



Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report

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National Center for Juvenile Justice
3700 S. Water Street, Suite 200
Pittsburgh, PA 15203-2363

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Chapter 6

Juvenile offenders in court

Law enforcement agencies refer approximately two-thirds of all arrested youth to a court with juvenile jurisdiction for further processing. As with law enforcement, the court may decide to divert some juveniles away from the formal justice system to other agencies for service. Prosecutors may file some juvenile cases directly to criminal (adult) court. The net result is that juvenile courts formally process more than 1 million delinquency and status offense cases annually. Juvenile courts adjudicate these cases and may order probation or residential placement or they may waive jurisdiction and transfer certain cases from juvenile court to criminal court. While their cases are being processed, juveniles may be held in secure detention.

This chapter quantifies the flow of cases through the juvenile court system. It documents the nature of,

and trends in, cases received and the court's response, and examines gender and race differences. (Chapter 4 on juvenile justice system structure and process describes the juvenile court process in general, the history of juvenile courts in the U.S., and state variations in current laws. Chapter 2 on victims discusses the handling of child maltreatment matters.) The chapter also discusses the measurement of racial disproportionality in the juvenile justice system—i.e., disproportionate minority contact, or DMC—and notes declines in certain DMC indicators since 1992.

The information presented in this chapter is drawn from the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is funded by OJJDP, and the Archive's primary publication, *Juvenile Court Statistics*.

The *Juvenile Court Statistics* report series details the activities of U.S. juvenile courts

***Juvenile Court Statistics* reports have provided data on court activity since the late 1920s**

The *Juvenile Court Statistics* series is the primary source of information on the activities of the nation's juvenile courts. The first *Juvenile Court Statistics* report, published in 1929 by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, described cases handled in 1927 by 42 courts. In the 1950s, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare took over the work, and in 1974, the newly established Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) took on the project. Since 1975, the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) has been responsible for this OJJDP project. The project, the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, not only produces the *Juvenile Court Statistics* reports, but conducts research and as an archive makes the data available to other researchers.

Throughout its history, the *Juvenile Court Statistics* series has depended on the voluntary support of courts with juvenile jurisdiction. Courts contribute data originally compiled to meet their own information needs. The data NCJJ receives are not uniform but reflect the natural variation that exists across court information systems. To develop national estimates, NCJJ restructures compatible data into a common format. In 2002, juvenile courts with jurisdiction over virtually 100% of the U.S. juvenile population contributed at least some data to the national reporting program. Because not all contributed data can support the national reporting requirements, the national estimates for 2002 were based on data from more than 2,100 jurisdictions containing nearly 75%

of the nation's juvenile population (i.e., youth age 10 through the upper age of original juvenile court jurisdiction in each state).

***Juvenile Court Statistics* documents the number of cases courts handled**

Just as the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program counts arrests made by law enforcement (i.e., a workload measure, not a crime measure), the *Juvenile Court Statistics* series counts delinquency and status offense cases handled by courts with juvenile jurisdiction during the year. Each case represents the initial disposition of a new referral to juvenile court for one or more offenses. A youth may be involved in more than one case in a year. Therefore, the *Juvenile Court Statistics* series does not provide a count of individual juveniles brought before juvenile courts.

Cases involving multiple charges are categorized by their most serious offense

In a single case where a juvenile is charged with robbery, simple assault, and a weapons law violation, the case is counted as a robbery case (similar to the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program's hierarchy rule). Thus, the *Juvenile Court Statistics* series does not provide a count of the number of crimes committed by juveniles. In addition, given that only the most serious offense is used to classify the case, counts of—and trends for—less serious offenses must be interpreted cautiously.

Similarly, cases are categorized by their most severe or restrictive

disposition. For example, a case in which the judge orders the youth to a training school and to pay restitution to the victim would be characterized as a case in which the juvenile was placed in a residential facility.

***Juvenile Court Statistics* describes delinquency and status offense caseloads**

The *Juvenile Court Statistics* series describes delinquency and status offense cases handled by juvenile courts. The reports provide demographic profiles of the youth referred and the reasons for the referrals (offenses). The series documents the juvenile courts' differential use of petition, detention, adjudication, and disposition alternatives by case type. The series also can identify trends in the volume and characteristics of court activity. However, care should be exercised when interpreting gender, age, or racial differences in the analysis of juvenile delinquency or status offense cases, because reported statistics do not control for the seriousness of the behavior leading to each charge or the extent of a youth's court history.

The *Juvenile Court Statistics* series does not provide national estimates of the number of youth referred to court, their prior court histories, or their future recidivism. Nor does it provide data on criminal court processing of juvenile cases. Criminal court cases involving youth younger than age 18 who are defined as adults in their state are not included. The series was designed to produce national estimates of juvenile court activity, not to describe the law-violating careers of juveniles.

Juvenile courts handled 1.6 million delinquency cases in 2002—up from 1.1 million in 1985

Juvenile court caseloads have grown and changed

In 2002, U.S. courts with juvenile jurisdiction handled an estimated 1.6 million cases in which the juvenile was charged with a delinquency offense—an offense for which an adult could be prosecuted in criminal court. Thus, U.S. juvenile courts handled more than 4,400 delinquency cases per day in 2002. In comparison, approximately 1,100 delinquency cases were processed daily in 1960.

Changes in the juvenile court delinquency caseload over the years have strained the courts' resources and programs. The volume of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts rose 41% between 1985 and 2002. Courts were asked to respond not only to more cases but also to a different type of caseload—one with more person offense and drug cases.

Law enforcement refers most delinquency cases to court

Delinquency and status offense cases are referred to juvenile courts by a number of different sources, including law enforcement agencies, social services agencies, victims, probation officers, schools, or parents.

Percent of cases referred by law enforcement agencies:

Offense	2002
Delinquency	82%
Person	87
Property	91
Drugs	90
Public order	61
Status offense (formal cases)	
Runaway	55%
Truancy	14
Ungovernability	30
Liquor	92

Youth were charged with a person offense in nearly one-quarter of the delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts in 2002

Most serious offense	Number of cases	Percent of total cases	Percent change	
			1985–2002	1997–2002
Total delinquency	1,615,400	100%	41%	–11%
Person offense	387,500	24	113	–2
Violent Crime Index	75,300	5	13	–29
Criminal homicide	1,700	0	41	–25
Forcible rape	4,700	0	8	–14
Robbery	21,500	1	–13	–36
Aggravated assault	47,400	3	32	–26
Simple assault	270,700	17	174	6
Other violent sex offense	16,400	1	150	31
Other person offense	25,200	2	144	18
Property offense	624,900	39	–10	–27
Property Crime Index	431,000	27	–16	–29
Burglary	100,000	6	–29	–29
Larceny–theft	284,400	18	–13	–29
Motor vehicle theft	38,500	2	0	–30
Arson	8,100	0	18	–10
Vandalism	94,800	6	11	–18
Trespassing	50,800	3	–5	–24
Stolen property offense	22,100	1	–20	–32
Other property offense	26,200	2	45	–16
Drug law violation	193,200	12	159	1
Public order offense	409,800	25	113	7
Obstruction of justice	182,600	11	180	10
Disorderly conduct	108,500	7	145	18
Weapons offense	35,900	2	85	–19
Liquor law violation	28,200	2	57	96
Nonviolent sex offense	15,500	1	16	20
Other public order offense	39,000	2	23	–25

■ Property crimes accounted for about 4 in 10 delinquency cases in 2002.

■ Although juvenile court referrals increased substantially between 1985 and 2002, the recent trend (1997–2002) is one of decline.

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

In 2002, 82% of delinquency cases were referred by law enforcement agencies. This proportion has changed little over the past two decades. Law enforcement agencies are generally much less likely to be the source of referral for formally

handled status offense cases (involving offenses that are not crimes for adults) than delinquency cases. The exception is status liquor law violations (underage drinking and possession of alcohol).

The long-term growth trend for juvenile court caseloads has been tempered by recent declines

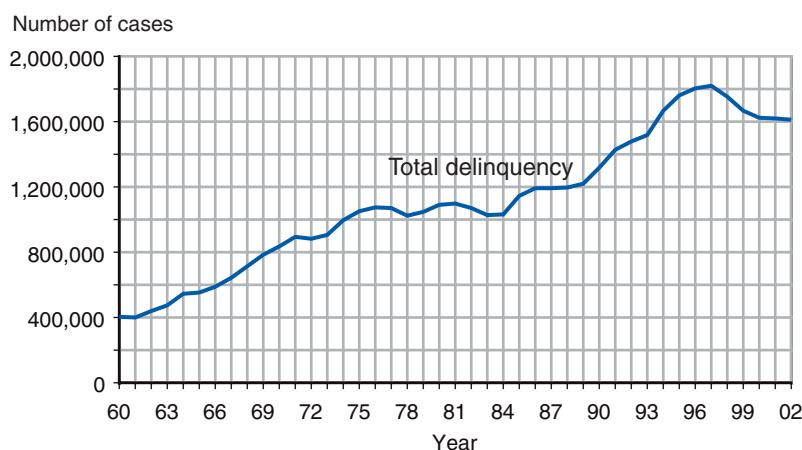
In most offense categories, juvenile court cases have decreased in recent years

Compared with 1997, cases involving offenses in the FBI's Violent Crime Index were down 29% in 2002. More specifically, criminal homicide was down 25%, forcible rape 14%, robbery 36%, and aggravated assault 26%.

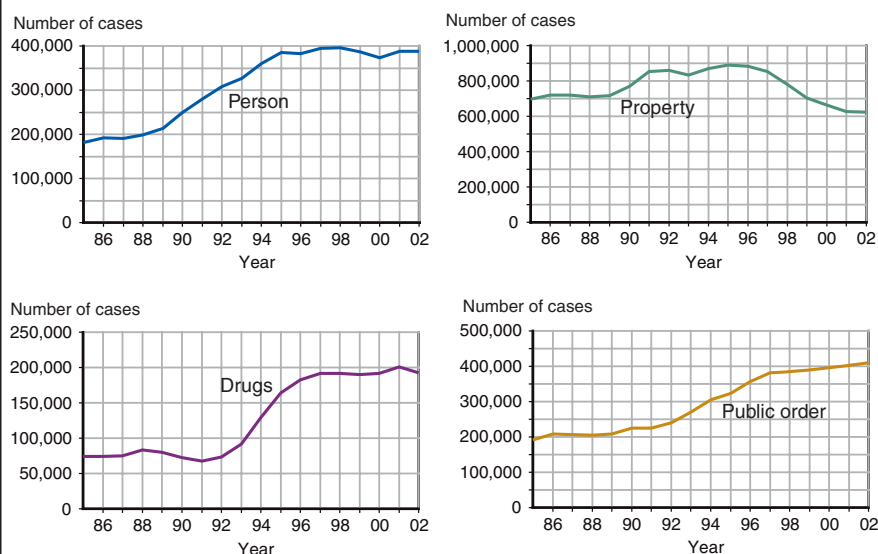
There were also large declines in cases involving property offenses—burglary and larceny-theft were down 29%, and motor vehicle theft 28%. Trespassing and stolen property offenses had declines greater than 30%. Declines were smaller for arson (10%) and vandalism (18%). Drug and public order offenses generally have not declined; however, they have leveled off since 1997.

Trends in juvenile court cases largely parallel trends in arrests of persons younger than 18. FBI data show that arrest rates for persons younger than 18 charged with Violent Crime Index offenses have dropped substantially since their peak in 1994. Similarly, juvenile arrest rates for Property Crime Index offenses were at their lowest level in three decades in 2002. Drug offenses are a noticeable exception—the FBI data show juvenile drug arrest rates peaking in 1997 and falling 25% through 2002. The court data show no such decline in the juvenile court's drug caseload. The data do not fully explain this pattern, but the pattern underscores the fact that not all arrests result in a juvenile court case and that juvenile court cases also come from sources other than police.

Juvenile courts handled four times as many delinquency cases in 2002 as in 1960



Delinquency cases, by offense category



- Between 1985 and 2002, the volume of delinquency cases handled by juvenile courts nationwide increased 41%. Delinquency cases dropped 11% from their 1997 peak to 2002.
- Caseloads increased in three of the four general offense categories. Person offense and public order offense cases each rose 113% and drug cases rose 159%. Person and public order cases together accounted for 90% of the growth in the delinquency caseload between 1985 and 2002. In contrast, property cases dropped 10%.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

An offense classification may encompass situations with a wide range of seriousness

The four general offense categories—person, property, drugs, and public order—are each very broad in terms of the seriousness of the offenses they comprise. Within these general categories, individual offenses (e.g., aggravated assault, robbery) may also encompass a wide range of seriousness. For example:

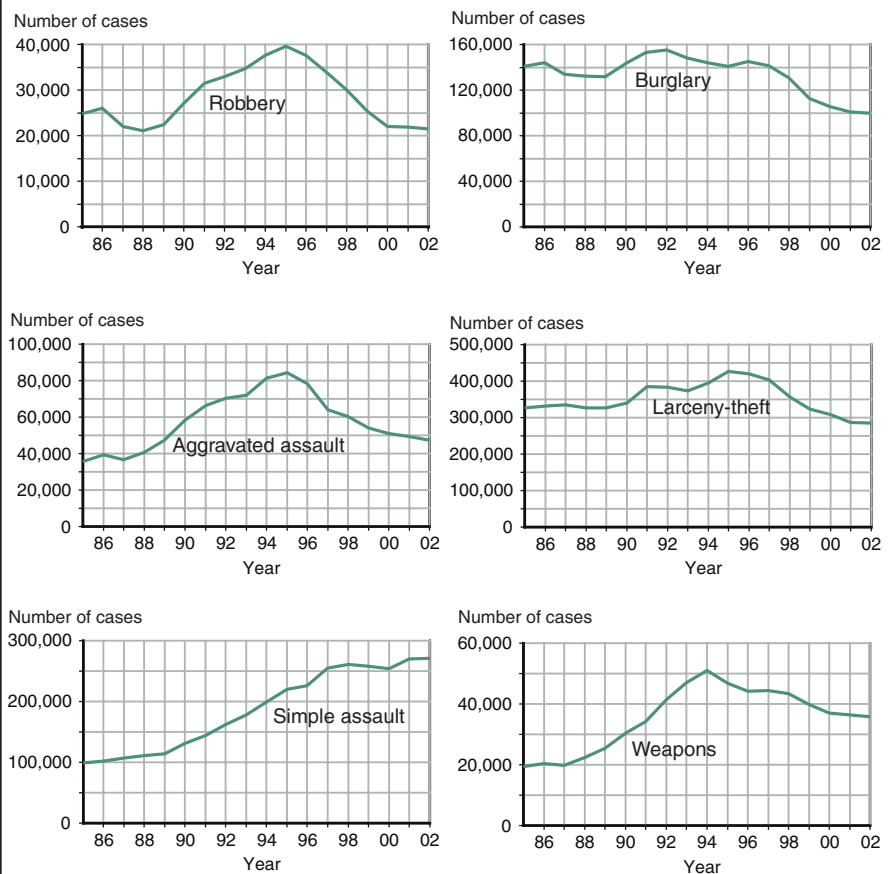
Aggravated assault is the unlawful intentional infliction of serious bodily injury or unlawful threat or attempt to inflict bodily injury or death by means of a deadly or dangerous weapon with or without actual infliction of injury. Aggravated assault includes the following situations:

- A gang attempts to kill a rival gang member in a drive-by shooting, but he survives the attack.
- A son fights with his father, causing injuries that require treatment at a hospital.
- A student raises a chair and threatens to throw it at a teacher but does not.

Robbery is the unlawful taking or attempted taking of property in the immediate possession of another person by force or threat of force. Robbery includes the following situations:

- Masked gunmen with automatic weapons demand cash from a bank.
- A gang of young men beat up a tourist and steal his wallet and valuables.
- A school bully says to another student, “Give me your lunch money, or I’ll punch you.”

Trend patterns for juvenile court caseloads from 1985 through 2002 varied substantially across offense categories



- Robbery cases peaked in 1995, near 40,000, then fell to levels of the late 1980s.
- Aggravated assault cases peaked in 1995, at 84,400, then fell off sharply. In contrast, simple assault cases climbed steadily through 1997, then leveled off at around 270,000 in 2001 and 2002.
- Burglary caseloads were relatively flat until 1997—since then, they have dropped to their lowest level since at least 1985.
- Larceny-theft cases peaked in 1995 at nearly 426,000 and have also dropped to their lowest level since at least 1985.
- Within the public order category, weapons offense cases peaked in 1994 at 51,100 and have dropped steadily since then.

Source: Authors' analyses of the National Center for Juvenile Justice's *National Juvenile Court Data Archive: Juvenile Court Case Records 1985–2002* [machine-readable data file].

Cases increased for males and females through the mid-1990s; since then cases have declined for males

Females account for a relatively small share of delinquency cases

In 2002, juvenile courts handled more than 423,000 delinquency cases involving female juveniles—just over one-quarter of all delinquency cases handled in 2002. Females made up a fairly large share of cases in some offense categories—larceny-theft (38%), disorderly conduct (33%), simple assault (32%), and liquor law cases (32%). For other offense categories, the female share of the caseload was relatively small—violent sex offenses other than rape (5%), robbery (9%), burglary (10%), arson (13%), and weapons offenses (14%).

Most serious offense	Female proportion
Total delinquency	26%
Person offense	28
Violent Crime Index	20
Criminal homicide	13
Forcible rape	3
Robbery	9
Aggravated assault	26
Simple assault	32
Other violent sex offense	5
Other person offense	27
Property offense	26
Property Crime Index	30
Burglary	10
Larceny-theft	38
Motor vehicle theft	23
Arson	13
Vandalism	16
Trespassing	19
Stolen property offense	15
Other property offense	32
Drug law violation	18
Public order offense	28
Obstruction of justice	29
Disorderly conduct	33
Weapons offense	14
Liquor law violation	32
Nonviolent sex offense	19
Other public order offense	25

For most offenses, female caseloads have grown more or decreased less than male caseloads

Most serious offense	Percent change			
	1985–2002		1997–2002	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total delinquency	29%	92%	–15%	0%
Person offense	91	202	–5	7
Violent Crime Index	9	70	–30	–23
Criminal homicide	39	58	–25	–25
Forcible rape	7	63	–14	6
Robbery	–16	18	–36	–42
Aggravated assault	20	84	–28	–19
Simple assault	152	238	4	12
Other violent sex offense	147	240	29	62
Other person offense	111	322	11	42
Property offense	–19	27	–29	–18
Property Crime Index	–26	23	–32	–20
Burglary	–31	–5	–30	–25
Larceny-theft	–27	25	–35	–19
Motor vehicle theft	–7	41	–31	–25
Arson	15	44	–10	–6
Vandalism	5	65	–20	–8
Trespassing	–8	12	–25	–16
Stolen property offense	–23	6	–33	–23
Other property offense	30	92	–18	–12
Drug law violation	156	171	–3	20
Public order offense	97	171	2	26
Obstruction of justice	169	210	4	26
Disorderly conduct	117	241	12	35
Weapons offense	73	223	–21	–3
Liquor law violation	38	123	79	143
Nonviolent sex offense	16	18	16	42
Other public order offense	17	45	–27	–21

■ Between 1985 and 2002, the overall delinquency caseload for females increased 92%, compared with a 29% increase for males.

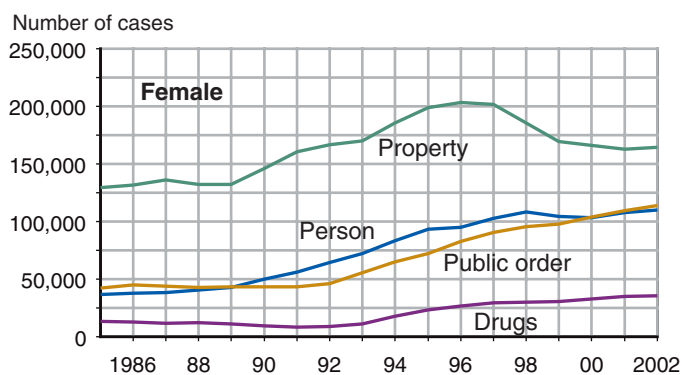
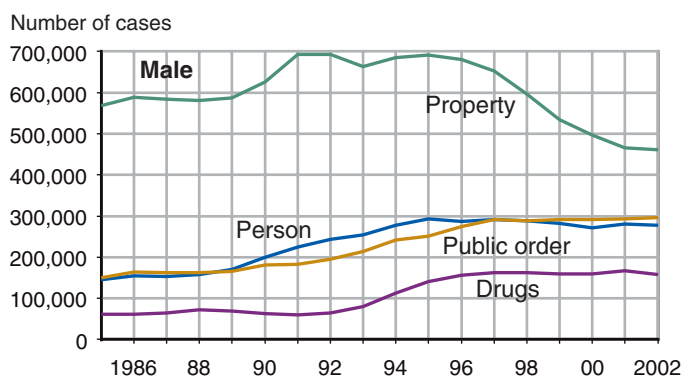
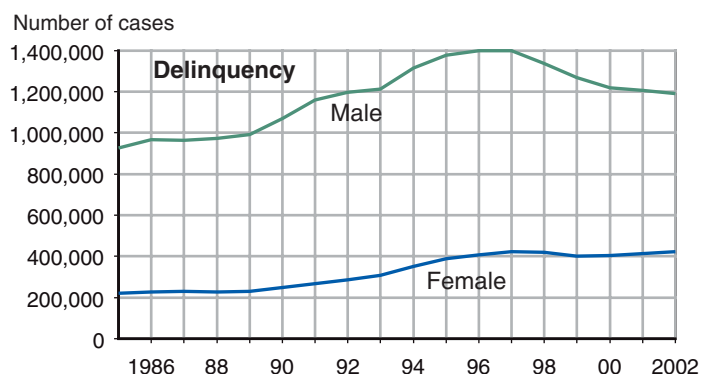
■ Among females, the number of aggravated assault cases rose substantially (up 84%) from 1985 to 2002. In comparison, among males, aggravated assault cases were up 20%.

■ Between 1997 and 2002, the number of aggravated assault cases dropped for both males and females, but the decline for males (28%) was greater than the decline for females (19%).

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding. Calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Source: Authors' analyses of the National Center for Juvenile Justice's *National Juvenile Court Data Archive: Juvenile Court Case Records 1985–2002* [machine-readable data file].

Juvenile court caseload trends are different for males and females, and the differences vary by offense category

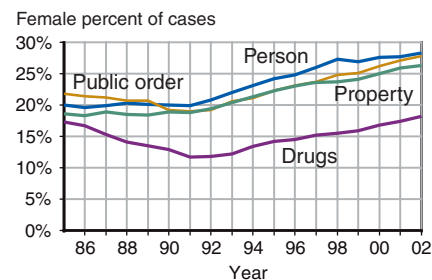
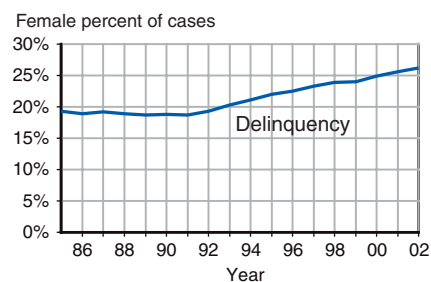


- Male delinquency caseloads have been on the decline since the mid-1990s. Female caseloads have not shown a similar decline, although they seem to have leveled off in recent years.
- The decline in male caseloads has been driven by a sharp reduction in the volume of property cases—down 34% from the 1994 peak to 2002.
- For females, the largest 1985–2002 increase was in person offense cases (202%). Drug and public order cases also rose substantially (each 171%).

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

The female share of delinquency cases increased steadily from 1991 through 2002

The proportion of delinquency cases that involved females was 19% in 1991; by 2002, it had increased 7 percentage points to 26%. The female share of person offense cases rose 8 percentage points over the same period to 28%. Property cases also saw an 8-point increase in the proportion of females, to 26% in 2002. The female proportion of drug cases went from 12% in 1991 to 18% in 2002, an increase of 6 points. Public order cases had the greatest increase in the proportion of females—9 percentage points from 1991 to 2002, up to 28%.



In 2002, male and female offense profiles were similar, but not as similar as they were in 1985

For both males and females, 2002 caseloads had smaller shares of property crimes and more person crimes than in 1985

Compared with offense profiles in 1985, both male and female delinquency caseloads had greater proportions of person offense cases in 2002.

Offense profile by sex:

Offense	Male	Female
2002		
Delinquency	100%	100%
Person	23	26
Property	39	39
Drugs	13	8
Public order	25	27
1985		
Delinquency	100%	100%
Person	16	16
Property	61	59
Drugs	7	6
Public order	16	19

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Both male and female caseloads saw substantial reductions in the proportion of cases that involved property crimes. Despite the reduction in the property crime share of delinquency cases, property cases were still the most common type of case for both males and females in 2002.

Compared with males, females had a greater proportion of person offense cases and a smaller proportion of drug offense cases in 2002. In 1985, the offense profiles for cases involving males and females differed less than in 2002.

Although males accounted for more than twice as many delinquency cases as females in 2002, their offense profiles were similar

Most serious offense	Male		Female	
	Number of cases	Percent of cases	Number of cases	Percent of cases
Total delinquency	1,192,300	100%	423,100	100%
Person offense	277,900	23	109,700	26
Violent Crime Index	60,600	5	14,700	3
Criminal homicide	1,500	0	200	0
Forcible rape	4,500	0	200	0
Robbery	19,500	2	2,000	0
Aggravated assault	35,100	3	12,300	3
Simple assault	183,400	15	87,300	21
Other violent sex offense	15,600	1	800	0
Other person offense	18,300	2	6,900	2
Property offense	460,400	39	164,500	39
Property Crime Index	301,600	25	129,400	31
Burglary	89,900	8	10,100	2
Larceny-theft	174,300	15	110,100	26
Motor vehicle theft	30,300	3	8,200	2
Arson	7,000	1	1,000	0
Vandalism	80,800	7	14,100	3
Trespassing	41,500	3	9,300	2
Stolen property offense	18,900	2	3,100	1
Other property offense	17,600	1	8,600	2
Drug law violation	158,100	13	35,100	8
Public order offense	296,000	25	113,800	27
Obstruction of justice	130,700	11	51,900	12
Disorderly conduct	73,500	6	35,000	8
Weapons offense	30,900	3	5,000	1
Liquor law violation	19,200	2	9,000	2
Nonviolent sex offense	12,800	1	2,800	1
Other public order offense	28,900	2	10,100	2

■ Compared with males, the female juvenile court caseload had a greater proportion of simple assault and larceny-theft cases and a smaller proportion of robbery, burglary, vandalism, and drug cases.

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Source: Authors' analyses of the National Center for Juvenile Justice's *National Juvenile Court Data Archive: Juvenile Court Case Records 1985–2002* [machine-readable data file].

A disproportionate number of delinquency cases involved black juveniles

In 2002, blacks constituted 16% of the juvenile population but 29% of the delinquency caseload

Although a majority of delinquency cases handled in 2002 involved white youth (1,086,700 or 67%), a disproportionate number of cases involved blacks (473,100 or 29%), given their proportion of the juvenile population. In 2002, white youth made up 78% of the juvenile population (youth ages 10 through the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction in each state), black youth 16%, and youth of other races 6%.*

Racial profile of delinquency cases:

Offense	White	Black	Other races	Total
2002				
Delinquency	67%	29%	3%	100%
Person	60	37	3	100
Property	68	28	4	100
Drugs	76	21	3	100
Public order	68	29	3	100
1985				
Delinquency	68	28	3	100
Person	58	39	2	100
Property	74	23	3	100
Drugs	79	19	2	100
Public order	77	21	2	100

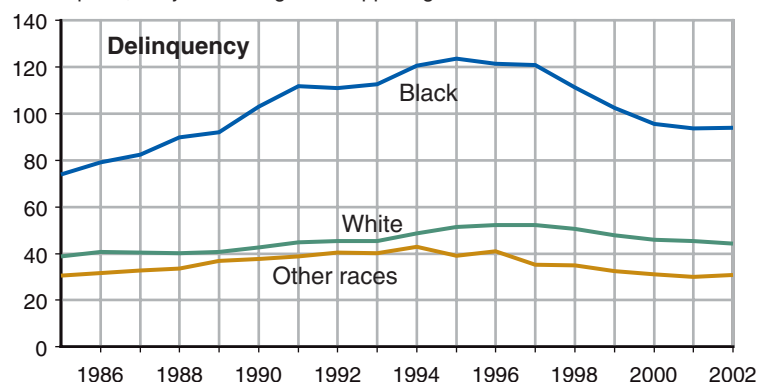
Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

The racial profile of delinquency cases overall was essentially the same in 1985 and 2002, although some of the general offense categories had noticeable changes. The proportion of black juveniles changed from 23% in 1985 to 28% in 2002 for property cases and from 21% to 29% for public order cases.

* Throughout this chapter, juveniles of Hispanic ethnicity can be any race; however, most are included in the white racial category.

The delinquency case rate rose from 1985 to 2002 for all races, but the rate for blacks remained well above the rates for other groups

Cases per 1,000 juveniles ages 10–upper age



- The delinquency case rate for white juveniles increased 35% from 1985 to its 1997 peak then dropped 15% by 2002 for an overall increase from 1985 to 2002 of 15%. Among black juveniles, the delinquency case rate increased 67% from 1985 to its 1995 peak then dropped 24% by 2002 for an overall increase from 1985 to 2002 of 27%. The delinquency case rate for juveniles of other races increased 40% from 1985 to its 1994 peak then dropped 28% by 2002 for an overall increase from 1985 to 2002 of 1%.
- In 2002, the delinquency case rate for blacks (94) was more than 2 times the rate for whites (44) and just over 3 times the rate for youth of other races (31).

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

Offense profiles for whites and blacks differed

Delinquency caseloads for black juveniles contained a greater proportion of person offenses than did caseloads for white juveniles and those of other races. For all racial groups, property offenses accounted for the largest proportion of cases and drug offenses the smallest proportion. Compared with 1985, for all racial groups, person and public order offenses made up a larger share and property offenses a smaller share of delinquency cases in 2002.

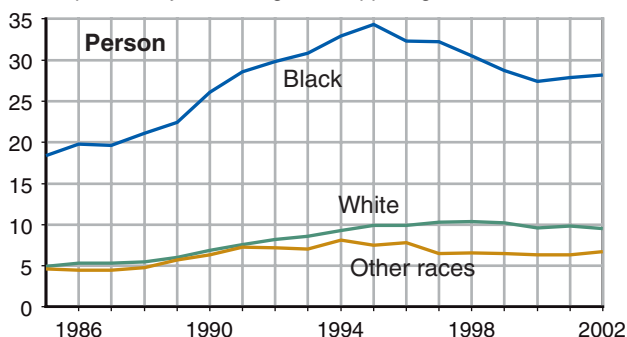
Offense profile of delinquency cases:

Offense	White	Black	Other races
2002			
Delinquency	100%	100%	100%
Person	22	30	22
Property	39	36	45
Drugs	13	9	10
Public order	26	25	23
1985			
Delinquency	100%	100%	100%
Person	13	25	15
Property	62	56	63
Drugs	7	5	7
Public order	18	14	16

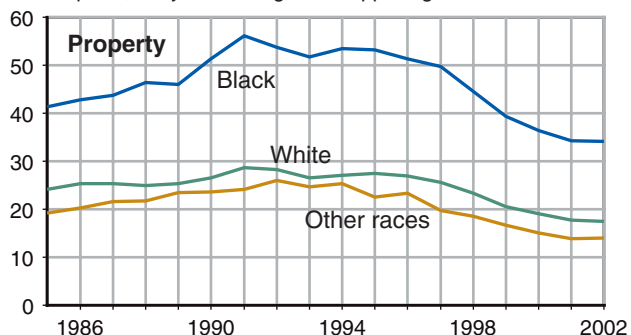
Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Case rate trends varied across race and offense, but in all offense categories from 1985 through 2002, the rates for black youth were substantially higher than the rates for other youth

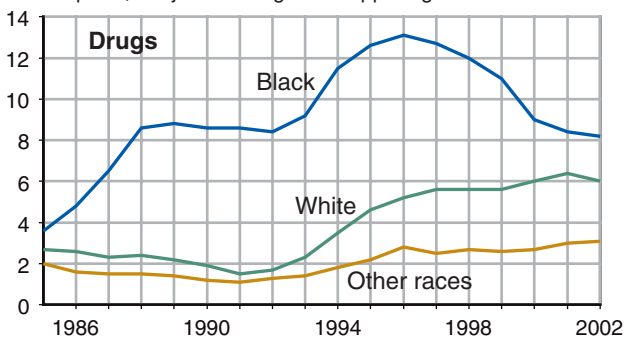
Cases per 1,000 juveniles ages 10–upper age



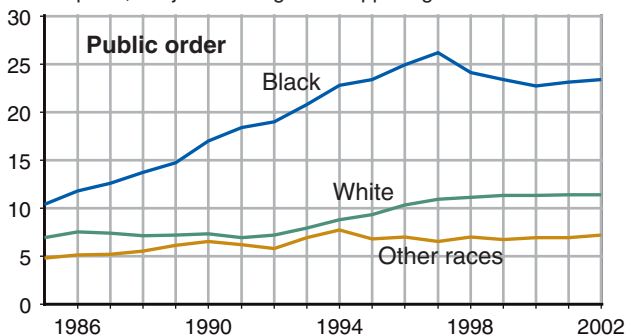
Cases per 1,000 juveniles ages 10–upper age



Cases per 1,000 juveniles ages 10–upper age



Cases per 1,000 juveniles ages 10–upper age



- Compared with 1985, 2002 person offense case rates were higher for all racial groups—up 93% for whites, 53% for blacks, and 47% for youth of other races. All racial groups experienced recent declines in person offense case rates—down 9% from the 1998 peak for whites, down 18% from the 1995 peak for blacks, and down 17% from the 1994 peak for other races.
- Property case rates dropped for all races between 1985 and 2002—down 28% for whites, 17% for blacks, and 27% for youth of other races. Property case rates for both white and black youth in 2002 were 39% below their 1991 peaks. The rate for youth of other races was highest in 1992 and was down 46% by 2002.
- Case rates for drug offenses more than doubled from 1985 to 2002 for both white (118%) and black (128%) youth. Among youth of other races, the drug case rate rose 52%. For black youth, the drug case rate peaked in 1996 and was down 37% by 2002. For white youth, the rate peaked in 2001 and then dropped 6% in 2002. For youth of other races, the drug offense case rate was higher in 2002 than any year since at least 1985.
- For white youth, the public order case rate was higher in 2002 than any year since at least 1985. Their 2002 rate was 66% higher than the 1985 rate. For blacks, the public order case rate was highest in 1997 and dropped 11% by 2002. Nevertheless, the 2002 rate was 125% above the 1985 rate. Similarly, for youth of other races, the rate in 2002 was 6% below the 1994 rate but still 52% above the 1985 rate.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

In 2002, the disparity between rates for black youth and white youth was lowest for drug cases

In 2002, case rates for black juveniles were substantially higher than rates for other juveniles in all offense categories, but the degree of disparity varied. The person offense case rate for black juveniles (28.2 per 1,000) was nearly 3 times the rate for white juveniles (9.5), the public order case rate for black juveniles (23.4) was more than 2 times the rate for white juveniles (11.4), and the property case rate for black juveniles (34.2) was nearly 2 times the rate for white juveniles (17.5).

In comparison, in 2002, the drug offense case rate for black juveniles (8.2) was less than 1.5 times the rate for white juveniles (6.0). Although the disparity between black and white drug case rates was relatively small in 2002, that was not always true. In fact, in 1991, the drug offense case rate for black juveniles was more than 5.5 times the rate for white juveniles. No other offense reached this extent of disparity between black and white case rates.

The racial profile for delinquency cases was similar for males and females in 2002

Among females referred to juvenile court in 2002 for person offenses, blacks accounted for 38% of cases—the greatest overrepresentation among black juveniles. The black proportion among males referred for person offenses was just slightly smaller at 36%.

Racial profile of delinquency cases by gender, 2002:

Offense	White	Black	Other races	Total
Male				
Delinquency	67%	29%	3%	100%
Person	61	36	3	100
Property	69	28	4	100
Drugs	73	24	3	100
Public order	69	28	3	100
Female				
Delinquency	67	30	4	100
Person	59	38	3	100
Property	68	28	4	100
Drugs	87	10	3	100
Public order	66	30	3	100

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Among females referred for drug offenses, blacks were underrepresented. Although they account for 16% of the population of juvenile females, blacks made up just 10% of drug cases involving females in 2002.

Youth of other races make up 6% of the juvenile population; they accounted for less than 5% of cases across all gender and offense groups.

Offense profiles for both males and females varied somewhat across racial groups

Among males in 2002, blacks had a greater proportion of person offense cases than whites or youth of other races. In addition, black males had a somewhat smaller proportion of property cases than white males or males of other races.

Offense profile of delinquency cases by race and gender, 2002:

Offense	White	Black	Other races
Male			
Delinquency	100%	100%	100%
Person	21	29	22
Property	39	36	45
Drugs	14	11	11
Public order	25	24	23
Female			
Delinquency	100%	100%	100%
Person	23	34	21
Property	40	36	47
Drugs	11	3	8
Public order	27	27	24

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Among females, person offenses accounted for 34% of the cases involving blacks, compared with 23% of the cases involving whites and 21% of the cases involving youth of other races. The drug offense share of cases involving females was greater for whites (11%) than for blacks (3%) or youth of other races (8%).

Compared with whites and blacks, the property offense share of delinquency cases was greater among youth of other races. This was true for both males and females.

Although older teens dominate delinquency caseloads, trends are similar for all age groups

For all ages, 2002 delinquency case rates were lower than rates in the mid- to late 1990s

In 2002, juvenile courts handled 51.5 delinquency cases for every 1,000 juveniles (youth subject to original juvenile court jurisdiction) in the U.S. population. The overall delinquency case rate peaked in 1996, 43% above the 1985 rate, and then declined 17% to the 2002 level. For all ages, delinquency case rates showed similar trend patterns, although the peak years varied from one age to another. Case rates for older juveniles peaked in 1994 or 1995 and rates for younger juveniles tended to peak in the later 1990s. Case rate declines were smaller for juveniles younger than 15 than for older teens.

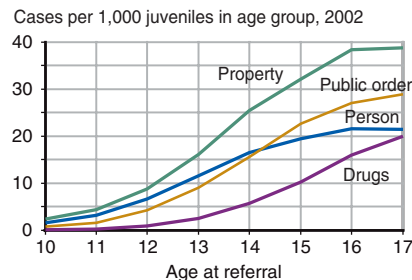
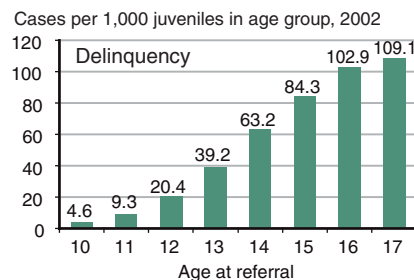
Most delinquency cases involve older teens

High-school-age juveniles (ages 14 and older) made up 80% of the delinquency caseload in 2002, older teens (ages 16 and older) accounted for 42%. In comparison, middle-school-age juveniles (ages 12 and 13) were involved in 16% of delinquency cases, while juveniles younger than 12 accounted for 5%. The 2002 age profile of delinquency cases was similar to the 1985 profile.

Age profile of delinquency cases:

Age	1985	2002
Total	100%	100%
Under 12	6	5
12	5	5
13	10	10
14	17	16
15	22	21
16	23	23
17	16	17
Over 17	2	2

Delinquency case rates generally increase with age



- In 2002, the delinquency case rate for 16-year-olds was 1.6 times the rate for 14-year-olds and the rate for 14-year-olds was 3.1 times the rate for 12-year-olds.
- The increase in rates between age 13 and age 17 was sharpest for drug offenses; the rate for drug offenses for 17-year-old juveniles was 8 times the rate for 13-year-olds.
- The growth in age-specific case rates was less dramatic for person offense cases. Person offense rates increased steadily through age 16 then dropped off at age 17, unlike rates for other offenses that increased through age 17. The person case rate for 17-year-olds was 84% higher than the rate for 13-year-olds.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

Age profiles varied somewhat across offenses but have not changed substantially since 1985.

Age profile of delinquency cases, 2002:

Age	Person	Property	Drugs	Public order
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Under 12	7	6	1	3
12	7	6	2	4
13	13	11	5	9
14	18	17	12	16
15	20	21	21	23
16	20	22	30	24
17	14	15	26	18
Over 17	1	2	3	4

Why do juvenile courts handle more 16- than 17-year-olds?

Although comparable numbers of 17-year-olds and 16-year-olds were arrested in 2002, the number of juvenile court cases involving 17-year-

olds (271,600) was lower than the number involving 16-year-olds (376,900). The explanation lies primarily in the fact that 13 states exclude 17-year-olds from the original jurisdiction of the juvenile court (see Chapter 4). In these states, all 17-year-olds are legally adults and are referred to criminal court rather than to juvenile court. Thus, far fewer 17-year-olds than 16-year-olds are subject to original juvenile court jurisdiction. Of the more than 31 million youth under juvenile court jurisdiction in 2002, youth ages 10 through 15 accounted for 80%, 12% were age 16, and 8% were age 17.

In 2002, offense profiles of younger and older youth differed

Compared with caseloads of older juveniles in 2002, the caseload of juveniles younger than 14 had larger

proportions of person and property offenses and smaller proportions of drug and public order offenses. In 1985, the proportions of person offense cases were similar for younger and older youth.

Compared with 1985 caseloads, person offenses were a substantially larger proportion of 2002 caseloads for all age groups. This shift was greatest for the youngest juveniles: person offenses increased from 16% of cases in 1985 to 34% in 2002. Public order offenses also accounted for a greater share of cases in 2002 than in 1985 across all age groups. These increases were offset by the declining share of property offenses.

Offense profile of delinquency cases by age:

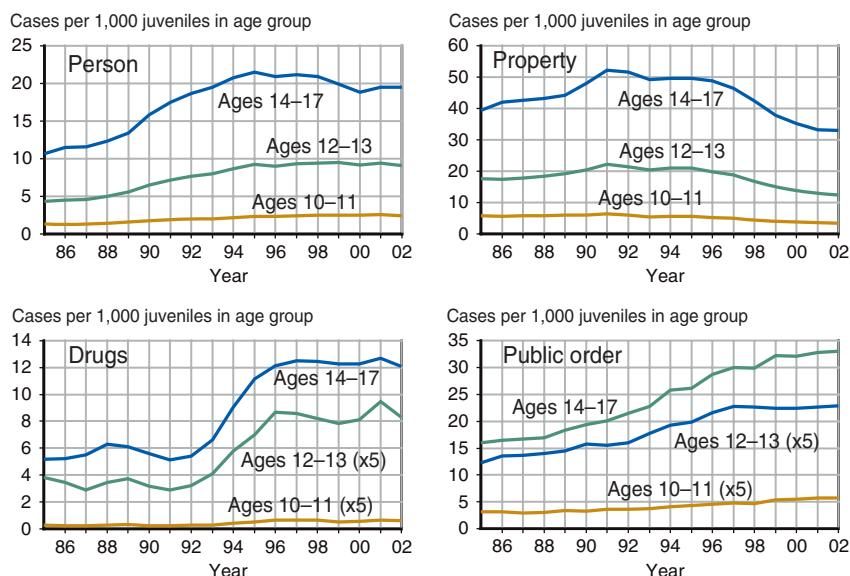
Offense	Under age 12	Ages 12–13	Over age 13
2002			
Delinquency	100%	100%	100%
Person	34	31	22
Property	48	42	38
Drugs	1	6	14
Public order	16	22	27
1985			
Delinquency	100%	100%	100%
Person	16	17	16
Property	75	68	58
Drugs	1	3	8
Public order	8	12	18

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

The age profile of delinquency cases did not differ substantially by gender or race in 2002

At each age, the proportion of cases was not more than 3 percentage points different for males compared to females. Among males, the largest proportion of delinquency cases involved 16-year-olds; among females, the largest proportion involved 15-year-olds. Age profiles across racial groups were also similar.

Between 1985 and 2002, trends in case rates were generally similar across age groups



- The person offense case rate for youth ages 14–17 rose from 1985 through 1995 then dropped off. Youth ages 12–13 had a similar pattern. For youth ages 10–11, the person offense rate was highest in 2001.
- For all age groups, property case rates peaked in 1991 and declined steadily thereafter.
- Drug offense case rates were relatively flat for all age groups from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, when they began to rise sharply. Rates flattened out again after 1996 for all ages.

Note: Because of the low volume of drug and public order cases involving younger juveniles, their case rates are inflated by a factor of 5 to display the trends over time.

Source: Authors' analyses of Stahl et al.'s *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics: 1985–2002* [data analysis application].

Age profile of delinquency cases by gender, 2002:

Age	Male	Female
Total	100%	100%
Under 12	5	3
12	5	5
13	10	12
14	15	18
15	21	23
16	24	22
17	18	15
Over 17	2	2

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Age profile of delinquency cases by race, 2002:

Age	White	Black	Other races
Total	100%	100%	100%
Under 12	4	6	5
12	5	7	6
13	9	12	11
14	16	17	16
15	21	22	20
16	24	22	21
17	18	13	18
Over 17	3	2	3

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

In 1 in 5 delinquency cases, the youth is detained between referral to court and case disposition

When is secure detention used?

A youth may be placed in a secure juvenile detention facility at various points during the processing of a case. Although detention practices vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, a general model of detention practices is useful.

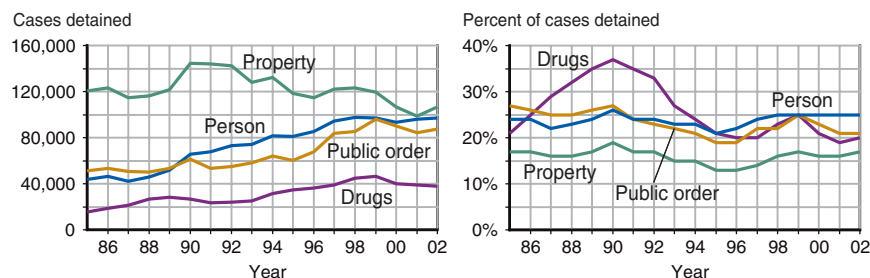
When a case is referred to juvenile court, intake staff may decide to hold the youth in a detention facility while the case is being processed. In general, detention is used if there is reason to believe the youth is a threat to the community, will be at risk if returned to the community, or may fail to appear at an upcoming hearing. The youth may also be detained for diagnostic evaluation purposes. In most delinquency cases, however, the youth is not detained.

In all states, law requires that a detention hearing be held within a few days (generally within 24 hours). At that time, a judge reviews the decision to detain the youth and either orders the youth released or continues the detention. National juvenile court statistics count the number of cases that involve detention during a calendar year. As a case is processed, the youth may be detained and released more than once between referral and disposition. Juvenile court data do not count individual detentions, nor do they count the number of youth detained. In addition, although in a few states juveniles may be committed to a detention facility as part of a disposition order, the court data do not include such placements in the count of cases involving detention.

The proportion of detained cases involving property offenses has declined

Although property offense cases were the least likely to involve

The number of cases involving detention was higher in 2002 than in 1985 for all but property cases



- The number of delinquency cases involving detention increased 42% between 1985 and 2002, from 234,600 to 329,800. The largest relative increase was for drug cases (140%), followed by person cases (122%) and public order cases (72%). In contrast, the number of detained property cases declined 12% during this period.
- Despite the growth in the volume of delinquency cases involving detention, the proportion of cases detained was the same in 2002 as in 1985 (20%). The percent of cases detained was highest in 1990 (23%) and lowest in 1995 and 1996 (17%).
- Property cases were the least likely to involve detention—youth were detained in 17% of property cases in 2002. In comparison, youth were detained in 21% of public order cases, 20% of drug cases, and 25% of person cases.
- In 1990, youth were detained in 37% of drug cases—the highest proportion of cases detained for any offense during the 1985–2002 period. In fact, no other offense category ever had more than 27% of cases detained.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

detention in 2002, they still accounted for the largest volume of cases involving detention because they represent the largest share of juvenile court caseloads. Property offense cases represented 32% of all detained delinquency cases in 2002, while person offenses accounted for 29% and public order cases 27%. Drug offense cases made up the smallest share of detained cases at 11%.

Compared with the offense profile of detained cases in 1985, the 2002 detention caseload had a substantially smaller proportion of property

offense cases. This was offset by a larger proportion of person offense cases.

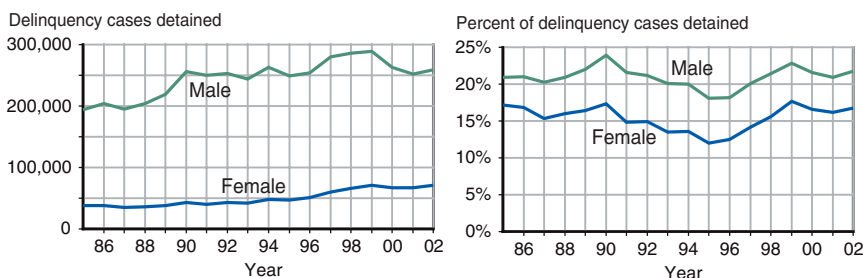
Offense profile of delinquency cases:

Offense	All cases		Detained cases	
	1985	2002	1985	2002
Delinquency	100%	100%	100%	100%
Person	16	24	19	29
Property	61	39	52	32
Drugs	7	12	7	11
Public order	17	25	22	27

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

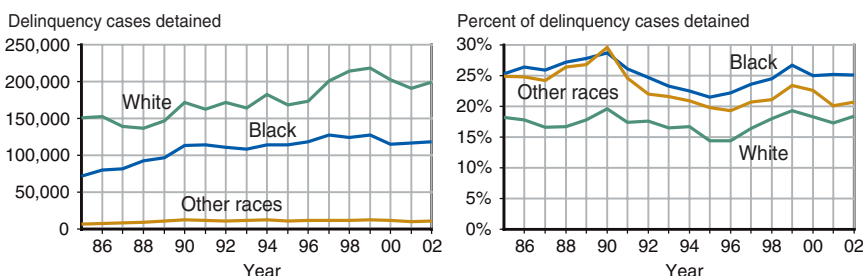
Use of detention varied not only by offense but also by gender, race, and age

Males accounted for most delinquency cases involving detention and were consistently more likely than females to be detained



- The number of male cases detained rose 49% from 1985 to 1999 and then dropped 10% for an overall increase of 34%. Females had an 87% increase in detained cases between 1985 and 1999. Between 1999 and 2002, the number of female cases detained changed little—the peak year was 1999 and the overall increase was 87%.
- The likelihood of detention was higher for males than for females, but the 1985–2002 trend lines for the percent of cases detained ran in tandem.

White youth accounted for the largest number of delinquency cases involving detention, although they were the least likely to be detained



- The number of delinquency cases involving white youth who were detained rose 44% from 1985 to its peak in 1999 and then dropped 9% for an overall increase of 32%. For black youth, the number of cases detained rose 77% from 1985 to its 1999 peak and then dropped 7% for an overall increase of 64%.
- The number of delinquency cases involving youth of other races who were detained peaked in 1990—79% above the 1985 figure. Between 1990 and 2002, the figure dropped 12% for an overall increase of 57%.
- For all racial groups, trends in the likelihood of detention followed similar patterns, although the proportion of cases involving detention remained lower for white youth than for black youth or youth of other races.
- For all racial groups, the likelihood of detention peaked in 1990 and showed a smaller rise in the late 1990s and subsequent fall into 2000.

Source: Authors' analyses of Stahl et al.'s *Easy access to juvenile court statistics: 1985–2002* [online analysis].

In 2002, the gender disparity in the likelihood of detention was least for drug cases

In 2002, the likelihood of detention in delinquency cases for males was 1.3 times the likelihood for females (22% vs. 17%). Males were more likely than females to be detained in each of the four general offense categories: 1.6 times more likely for property offenses, 1.3 times for public order offenses, 1.2 for person offenses, and 1.1 for drug offenses.

Percent of cases detained, 2002:

Offense	Male	Female
Delinquency	22%	17%
Person	26	22
Property	19	12
Drugs	20	18
Public order	23	18

The degree of racial disparity in the likelihood of detention varied across offense

In 2002, the likelihood of detention was greatest for black youth for all but public order offenses—youth of other races had a slightly greater percent of public order cases detained (24%) than black youth (23%). The overall percent of cases detained for blacks was 1.4 times that for whites and 1.2 times that for other races. The greatest disparity between blacks and whites or other races was in the likelihood of detention in drug cases—the proportion for blacks was more than 2 times that for whites and nearly 2 times that for youth of other races.

Percent of cases detained, 2002:

Offense	White	Black	Other races
Delinquency	18%	25%	21%
Person	23	28	27
Property	15	22	17
Drugs	16	33	17
Public order	21	23	24

The racial profile for detained delinquency cases was similar for males and females in 2002

In 2002, the black proportion of detained delinquency cases (36%) was substantially greater than the black proportion of the juvenile population (16%) and also greater than the black proportion of delinquency cases handled during the year (29%). The overrepresentation of black juveniles in the detention caseload was greater among person offenses (41%) than other offenses. The black proportion of detained person offense cases was similar among males (40%) and females (41%). Across offenses, for males and females, the black proportion of detained cases was in the 30%–40% range. The one exception was among detained females referred for drug offenses. Blacks accounted for just 19% of this group—close to their representation in the juvenile population (16%).

Racial profile of detained cases by gender, 2002:

Offense	White	Black	Other races	Total
Total				
Delinquency	61%	36%	3%	100%
Person	56	41	3	100
Property	60	36	4	100
Drugs	61	36	2	100
Public order	66	31	4	100
Male				
Delinquency	60	36	3	100
Person	56	40	4	100
Property	60	36	4	100
Drugs	58	40	2	100
Public order	66	31	4	100
Female				
Delinquency	62	35	4	100
Person	56	41	3	100
Property	61	35	4	100
Drugs	78	19	4	100
Public order	64	32	4	100

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

The offense profile of detained cases varied by race and by gender in 2002

For males, the person offense share of delinquency cases was greater among detained cases involving black youth (31%) than among detained cases involving white youth (26%) or youth of other races (28%). For male youth of other races, drug offense cases accounted for 8% of detained cases, compared with 12% for white males and 13% for black males.

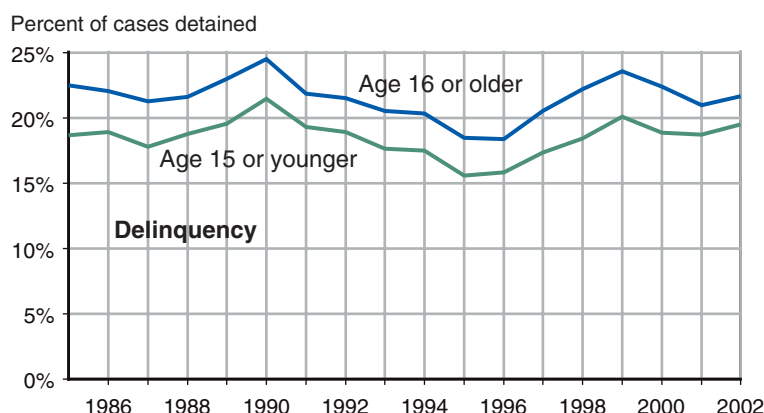
Among females, blacks had a higher proportion of person offenses in the detention caseload (41%) than did either whites (31%) or youth of other races (27%). For white females, drug offense cases accounted for 11% of detained cases, compared with 5% for black females and 9% for females of other races.

Offense profile of detained cases by race and gender, 2002:

Offense	White	Black	Other races
Total			
Delinquency	100%	100%	100%
Person	27	33	28
Property	32	32	36
Drugs	12	12	8
Public order	29	23	28
Male			
Delinquency	100%	100%	100%
Person	26	31	28
Property	34	33	38
Drugs	12	13	8
Public order	29	22	26
Female			
Delinquency	100%	100%	100%
Person	31	41	27
Property	27	28	32
Drugs	11	5	9
Public order	30	26	32

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Each year from 1985 through 2002, delinquency cases involving youth age 16 or older were more likely to be detained than were cases involving youth age 15 or younger



Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

The petitioned caseload increased 80% from 1985 to 2002 as formal case handling became more likely

In a formally processed case, petitioners ask the court to order sanctions

Formal case handling involves the filing of a petition requesting that the court hold an adjudicatory or waiver hearing. Decisionmakers (police, probation, intake, prosecutor, or other screening officer) may consider informal case handling if they believe that accountability and rehabilitation can be achieved without formal court intervention. Compared with informally handled (nonpetitioned) cases, formally processed (petitioned) delinquency cases tend to involve more serious offenses, older juveniles, and juveniles with longer court histories.

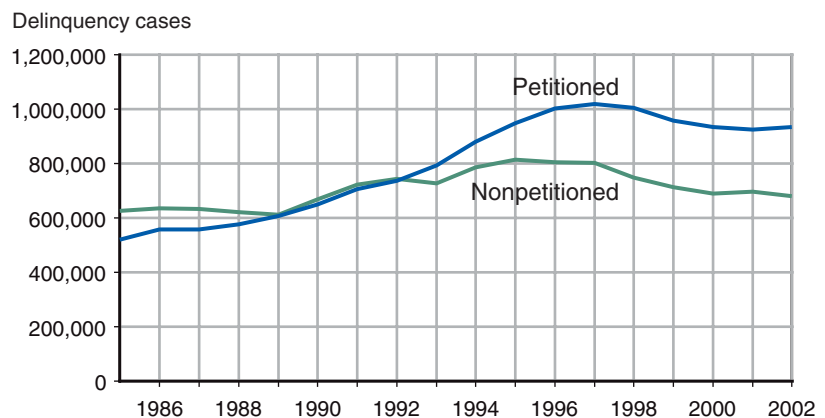
If the court decides to handle the matter informally, the offender agrees to comply with one or more sanctions such as community service, victim restitution, or voluntary probation supervision. Informal cases are generally held open pending successful completion of the disposition. If the court's conditions are met, the charges are dismissed. If, however, the offender does not fulfill the conditions, the case is likely to be petitioned for formal processing.

The use of formal handling has increased

In 1985, juvenile courts formally processed 45% of delinquency cases. By 2002, that proportion had increased to 58%. Cases in each of the four general offense categories were more likely to be handled formally in 2002 than in 1985.

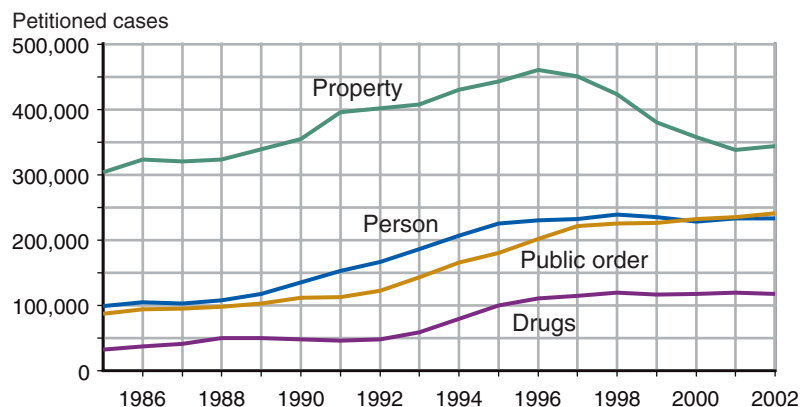
In 2002, property offense cases were the least likely to be petitioned for formal handling, and drug cases were the most likely. In fact, from 1985 to 2002, drug offense cases went from least likely to most

The number of petitioned delinquency cases increased 96% between 1985 and the peak in 1997, then declined 8% by 2002



- The number of delinquency cases petitioned in 2002 (934,900) was 80% more than the number petitioned in 1985 (520,200). In comparison, the overall number of delinquency cases referred increased 41% in that time.
- Compared with the trend for the petitioned caseload, the trend for nonpetitioned cases was flatter. The number of nonpetitioned delinquency cases increased 28% between 1985 and the peak in 1997 then declined 15% by 2002 for an overall increase of 9%.

Between 1985 and 2002, the petitioned caseload increased for each of the four general offense categories



- Between 1985 and 2002, petitioned person offense cases increased 137%, property cases 13%, drug offense cases 26%, and public order cases 178%.
- The up-and-down trend in the petitioned caseload for delinquency cases overall was driven by property cases. The number of petitioned property cases increased 52% between 1985 and the peak in 1996 then declined 25% by 2002. Among the other offense categories, the number of petitioned cases increased and then leveled off but did not decline noticeably.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

likely to be petitioned. The 61% petitioning rate for drug cases in 2002, however, was substantially lower than the peak rate of 68% in 1991. No other offense category experienced such an upsurge in petitioning between 1985 and 2002.

Percent of delinquency cases petitioned:

Offense	1985	2002
Delinquency	45%	58%
Person	54	60
Property	44	55
Drugs	43	61
Public order	45	59

The proportion of petitioned cases increased from 1985 to 2002 for all demographic groups

The likelihood of formal case processing increased from 1985 to 2002 for both males and females and for all races and ages.

Percent of delinquency cases petitioned:

Characteristic	1985	2002
Gender		
Male	48%	61%
Female	35	50
Race		
White	42	55
Black	56	65
Other races	44	58
Age		
15 or younger	42	55
16 or older	50	61

In 2002, as in 1985, courts petitioned a larger share of delinquency cases involving males than females. This was true for each of the general offense categories. Courts petitioned a larger share of delinquency cases involving blacks than whites or youth of other races.

In 2002, juvenile courts petitioned nearly 6 in 10 delinquency cases for formal handling and adjudicated youth delinquent in nearly 7 in 10 of those petitioned cases

Most serious offense	Number of petitioned cases	Percent of delinquency cases petitioned	Number of adjudicated cases	Percent of petitioned cases adjudicated
Total delinquency	934,900	58%	624,500	67%
Person offense	233,300	60	145,800	62
Violent Crime Index	56,400	75	37,000	66
Criminal homicide	1,400	82	800	57
Forcible rape	3,700	78	2,500	68
Robbery	18,600	86	11,900	64
Aggravated assault	32,700	69	21,900	67
Simple assault	147,900	55	90,500	61
Other violent sex offense	13,300	81	9,100	68
Other person offense	15,800	63	9,200	58
Property offense	343,500	55	233,600	68
Property Crime Index	237,600	55	166,700	70
Burglary	77,800	78	58,300	75
Larceny-theft	124,100	44	83,600	67
Motor vehicle theft	30,300	79	21,500	71
Arson	5,400	67	3,400	63
Vandalism	49,100	52	31,800	65
Trespassing	23,900	47	13,600	57
Stolen property offense	16,500	75	10,200	62
Other property offense	16,500	63	11,300	68
Drug law violation	117,100	61	79,100	68
Public order offense	240,900	59	166,000	69
Obstruction of justice	129,500	71	92,800	72
Disorderly conduct	47,900	44	29,900	62
Weapons offense	21,400	60	14,700	69
Liquor law violation	9,800	35	6,000	61
Nonviolent sex offense	8,500	55	6,100	72
Other public order offense	23,800	61	16,500	69

- Generally, more serious offenses were more likely to be petitioned for formal processing than were less serious offenses.
- For criminal homicide, robbery, and violent sex offenses other than rape, more than 80% of cases were petitioned. The proportion of cases petitioned was lower than 50% for liquor law violations, disorderly conduct, larceny-theft, and trespassing.
- For most offenses, the youth was adjudicated delinquent in more than 60% of petitioned cases.

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

From 1985 to 2002, the number of cases in which the youth was adjudicated delinquent rose 85%

Adjudication was more likely for some types of cases than others

Youth were adjudicated delinquent in a smaller proportion of person offense cases than in cases involving other categories of offenses. This lower rate of adjudication in person offense cases may reflect, in part, reluctance to divert these cases from the formal juvenile justice system without a judge's review.

Adjudication rates also varied by gender, race, and age of the youth. The likelihood of adjudication in 2002 was somewhat less for females than for males. This was true across offense categories. Black youth were less likely to be adjudicated than were white youth or youth of other

racess. Cases involving youth age 15 or younger were slightly more likely to result in adjudication than cases involving older youth, although older youth had a greater share of cases waived to criminal court.

Percent of petitioned delinquency cases adjudicated:

Offense	1985	2002
Gender		
Male	66%	67%
Female	62	64
Race		
White	67	71
Black	59	58
Other races	72	75
Age		
15 or younger	66	67
16 or older	64	66

Offense profiles for petitioned and adjudicated cases show a shift away from property cases

Compared with 1985, both petitioned and adjudicated cases had increased proportions of person, drug, and public order offenses in 2002. The 2002 offense profile for adjudicated cases was very similar to the profile for petitioned cases.

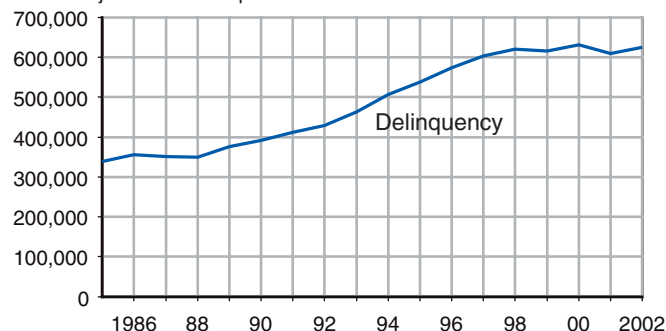
Offense profile of delinquency cases:

Offense	1985	2002
Petitioned cases	100%	100%
Person	19	25
Property	58	37
Drugs	6	13
Public order	17	26
Adjudicated cases	100%	100%
Person	16	23
Property	59	37
Drugs	7	13
Public order	18	27

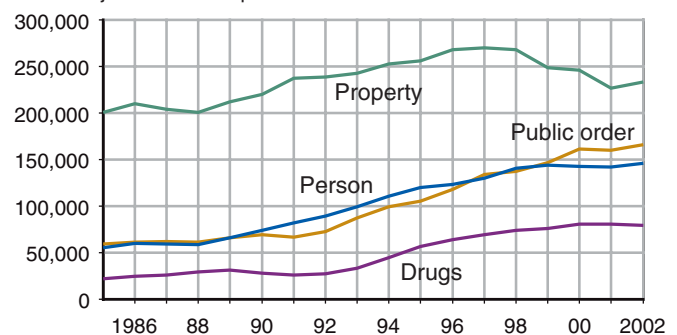
Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

The number of cases in which the youth was adjudicated delinquent rose steadily from 1985 to 2002; except for property cases, the offense-specific trends followed the same pattern

Cases adjudicated delinquent



Cases adjudicated delinquent



- The number of cases in which the youth was adjudicated delinquent increased for all offense categories between 1985 and 2002 (person 162%, property 16%, drugs 257%, and public order 180%). Only property offenses had a decline in adjudicated cases in recent years—down 13% between 1997 and 2002.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

Most adjudicated delinquency cases result in residential placement or formal probation

Residential placement and formal probation caseloads saw a shift away from property cases

Compared with 1985, both residential placement and formal probation cases had increased proportions of person, drug, and public order offenses in 2002. In 2002, cases ordered to residential placement had a greater share of person and public order cases and a smaller share of drug cases than cases ordered to formal probation.

Offense profile of delinquency cases:

Offense	1985	2002
Residential placement	100%	100%
Person	18	26
Property	56	37
Drugs	5	10
Public order	22	28
Formal probation	100%	100%
Person	16	24
Property	61	38
Drugs	7	13
Public order	16	25

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Residential placement and probation caseloads increased between 1985 and 2002

The number of delinquency cases in which adjudicated youth were ordered out of the home to some form of residential placement rose 44% between 1985 and 2002, from 100,400 to 144,000. In comparison, the number of delinquency cases receiving formal probation as the most severe initial disposition following adjudication more than doubled from 1985 to 2002, from 189,600 to 385,400. The growth in formal probation cases was greater than the growth in delinquency cases at referral (41%) and adjudication (85%).

The number of adjudicated cases receiving other sanctions (e.g.,

In 2002, residential placement or formal probation was ordered in 85% of cases in which the youth was adjudicated delinquent

Most serious offense	Adjudicated cases			
	Number ordered to placement	Percent ordered to placement	Number ordered to probation	Percent ordered to probation
Total delinquency	144,000	23%	385,400	62%
Person offense	37,200	25	92,000	63
Violent Crime Index	12,500	34	20,900	56
Criminal homicide	400	50	300	43
Forcible rape	1,000	39	1,100	44
Robbery	5,000	42	6,000	50
Aggravated assault	6,100	28	13,400	62
Simple assault	20,000	22	59,200	65
Other violent sex offense	2,700	30	5,800	64
Other person offense	1,900	21	6,200	68
Property offense	52,700	23	147,300	63
Property Crime Index	39,600	24	106,200	64
Burglary	15,500	27	37,400	64
Larceny-theft	15,900	19	54,100	65
Motor vehicle theft	7,400	35	12,400	58
Arson	700	21	2,200	64
Vandalism	5,400	17	20,800	65
Trespassing	2,300	17	8,600	63
Stolen property offense	3,100	30	5,500	54
Other property offense	2,200	19	6,100	54
Drug law violation	14,400	18	50,900	64
Public order offense	39,800	24	95,200	57
Obstruction of justice	28,400	31	52,500	57
Disorderly conduct	3,900	13	17,600	59
Weapons offense	3,200	22	9,600	65
Liquor law violation	600	10	3,500	59
Nonviolent sex offense	1,700	28	3,800	62
Other public order offense	1,900	12	8,200	50

- Cases involving youth adjudicated for serious person offenses, such as homicide, rape, or robbery, were the most likely cases to result in residential placement.
- Probation was the most restrictive disposition used in 385,400 cases adjudicated delinquent in 2002—62% of all such cases handled by juvenile courts.
- Obstruction of justice cases had a relatively high residential placement rate, stemming from the inclusion in the category of certain offenses (e.g., escapes from confinement and violations of probation or parole) that have a high likelihood of placement.

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Calculations are based on unrounded numbers.

Source: Authors' analyses of the National Center for Juvenile Justice's *National Juvenile Court Data Archive: Juvenile court case records 1985–2002* [machine-readable data file].

community service, restitution) as their most severe disposition rose 140% from 1985 to 2002, from 35,400 to 85,000. However, the majority of cases resulting in other sanctions were handled informally.

Probation was more likely than residential placement

In 23% of adjudicated delinquency cases, the court ordered the youth to residential placement such as a training school, treatment center, boot camp, drug treatment or private placement facility, or group home. In 62% of adjudicated delinquency cases, probation was the most severe sanction ordered.

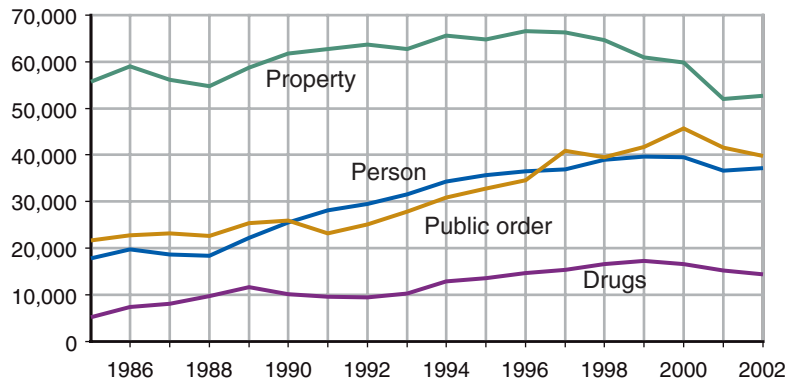
Percent of adjudicated delinquency cases, 2002:

Characteristic	Residential placement	Formal probation
Total	23%	62%
Gender		
Male	25	61
Female	18	65
Race		
White	21	62
Black	27	63
Other races	25	54
Age		
15 or younger	22	65
16 or older	25	58

Once adjudicated, females were less likely than males, and white youth were less likely than black youth or youth of other races, to be ordered to residential placement. These demographic patterns in the use of residential placement and probation, however, do not control for criminal histories and other risk factors related to dispositional decisions and increased severity of sanctions.

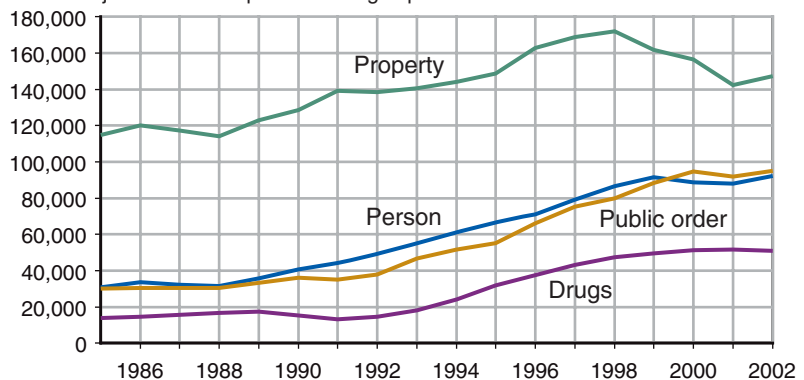
Trends in the number of adjudicated property offense cases ordered to residential placement or probation were different from trends for other offenses

Cases adjudicated delinquent resulting in residential placement



- The number of adjudicated cases in which the youth was ordered to residential placement increased 44% from 1985 to 2002. Residential placement cases rose 179% for drug offenses, 109% for person offenses, and 83% for public order offenses. For property offenses, the number of adjudicated cases resulting in residential placement decreased 5%.

Cases adjudicated delinquent resulting in probation



- Between 1985 and 2002, the number of cases in which the youth was adjudicated delinquent and ordered to formal probation increased for all offense categories (person 198%, property 28%, drugs 267%, and public order 218%). Only property offenses had a substantial decline in recent years in adjudicated cases ordered to formal probation—down 14% between 1998 and 2002.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

Probation conditions are designed to control and rehabilitate

Probation is the oldest and most widely used community-based corrections program. Probation is used both for first-time, low-risk offenders and as an alternative to institutional confinement for more serious offenders. During a period of probation supervision, a juvenile offender remains in the community and can continue normal activities such as school and work. However, the juvenile must comply with certain conditions.

Compliance with probation conditions may be voluntary: the youth agrees to conditions in lieu of formal adjudication. Or compliance may be mandatory following adjudication: the youth is formally ordered to a term of probation and must comply with the conditions established by the court. Most (62%) juvenile probation dispositions in 2002 were formal (i.e., enacted under court order following adjudication).

In addition to being required to meet regularly with a probation officer, a juvenile assigned to probation may be ordered to adhere to a curfew, complete a specified period of community service, or pay restitution. More serious offenders may be placed on intensive supervision requiring more frequent contact with their probation officer and stricter conditions. Typically, probation can be revoked if the juvenile violates the conditions. If probation is revoked, the court may reconsider its disposition and impose stricter sanctions.

Black youth account for a disproportionate share of cases at all stages of case processing

Racial profile, 2002:

Stage/ offense	White	Black	Other races	Total
Referred				
Delinquency	67%	29%	3%	100%
Person	60	37	3	100
Property	68	28	4	100
Drugs	76	21	3	100
Public order	68	29	3	100
Detained				
Delinquency	61	36	3	100
Person	56	41	3	100
Property	60	36	4	100
Drugs	61	36	2	100
Public order	66	31	4	100
Petitioned				
Delinquency	64	33	3	100
Person	57	40	3	100
Property	65	31	4	100
Drugs	70	28	3	100
Public order	66	31	3	100
Waived to criminal court				
Delinquency	62	35	3	100
Person	55	41	4	100
Property	71	26	3	100
Drugs	58	39	2	100
Public order	65	32	4	100
Adjudicated				
Delinquency	67	29	4	100
Person	61	36	4	100
Property	68	27	4	100
Drugs	74	23	3	100
Public order	69	27	4	100
Ordered to residential placement				
Delinquency	63	33	4	100
Person	58	37	4	100
Property	65	30	5	100
Drugs	59	38	3	100
Public order	65	31	4	100
Ordered to formal probation				
Delinquency	67	29	3	100
Person	61	36	3	100
Property	68	28	4	100
Drugs	75	22	3	100
Public order	69	28	3	100

Juvenile population

Ages 10 to				
upper age	78	16	6	100

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

The overrepresentation of black youth was greatest for person offense cases. At most stages of case processing, the share of white youth was greater for drug offenses than other offense categories. At all stages of the system, youth of other races made up 5% or less of the caseload.

The proportion of cases that involved black youth was the same for adjudicated cases as for cases overall (29%). In fact, the racial profile of cases was similar at referral and adjudication for all offense categories.

The largest proportion of black youth was found in detained and waived person offense cases, where black youth accounted for 41% of cases.

How were delinquency cases processed in juvenile courts in 2002?

Juvenile courts can impose a range of sanctions

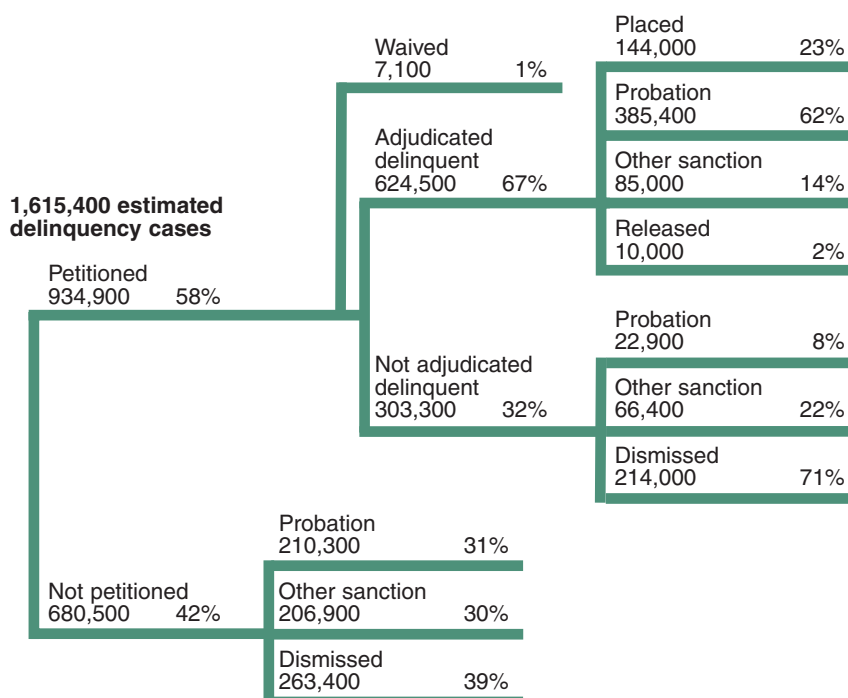
Although juvenile courts handled more than 4 of 10 delinquency cases without the filing of a petition, more than half of these nonpetitioned cases received some sort of sanction. Juveniles may have agreed to informal probation, restitution, or community service, or the court may have referred them to another agency for services. Although probation staff monitor the juvenile's compliance with the informal agreement, such dispositions generally involve little or no continuing supervision by probation staff.

In 32% of all petitioned delinquency cases, the youth was not adjudicated delinquent. The court dismissed 71% of these cases. The court-dismissed cases, together with the cases that were dismissed at intake, accounted for 477,400 cases (or 295 of 1,000 cases handled).

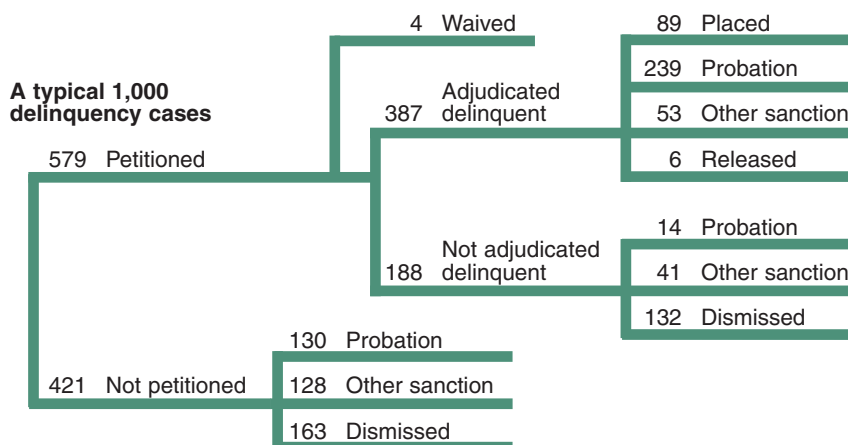
In a relatively small number of cases (10,000), the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent but was released with no further sanction or consequence. These cases accounted for about 2% of adjudicated cases (or 6 of 1,000 cases processed during the year).

In 66% of all petitioned cases, the courts imposed a formal sanction or waived the case to criminal court. Thus, of every 1,000 delinquency cases handled formally in 2002, 385 resulted in waiver or a court-ordered sanction.

In 2002, the most severe sanction ordered in 85,000 adjudicated delinquency cases (14%) was something other than residential placement or probation, such as restitution or community service



Adjudicated cases receiving sanctions other than residential placement or probation accounted for 53 out of 1,000 delinquency cases processed during the year



Notes: Cases are categorized by their most severe or restrictive sanction. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

Person offense cases

602 Petitioned

Per 1,000 male cases

626 Petitioned

Per 1,000 female cases

540 Petitioned

Per 1,000 female cases

Category	Count	Outcome
Petitioned	540	
Adjudicated delinquent	322	
Not adjudicated delinquent	217	
Not petitioned	460	
Waived	1	
Placed	63	
Probation	221	
Other sanction	33	
Released	6	
Probation	17	
Other sanction	41	
Dismissed	158	
Probation	146	
Other sanction	119	
Dismissed	195	

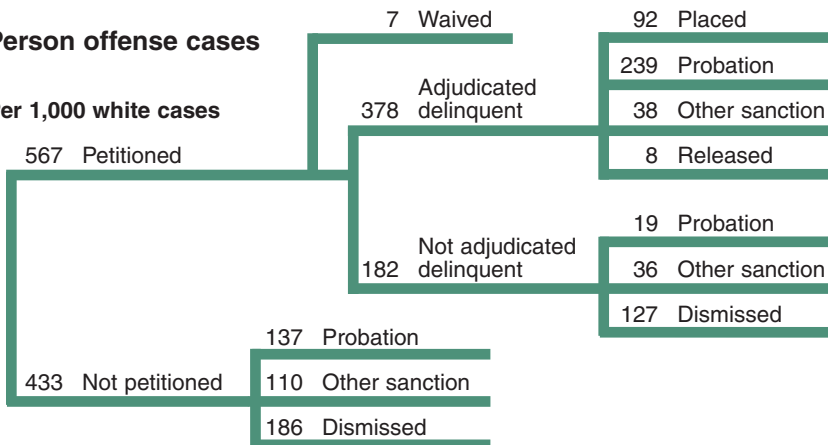
- Notes: Cases are categorized by their most severe or restrictive sanction. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: Authors' adaptation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Juveniles in court. *OJJDP statistical briefing book*.

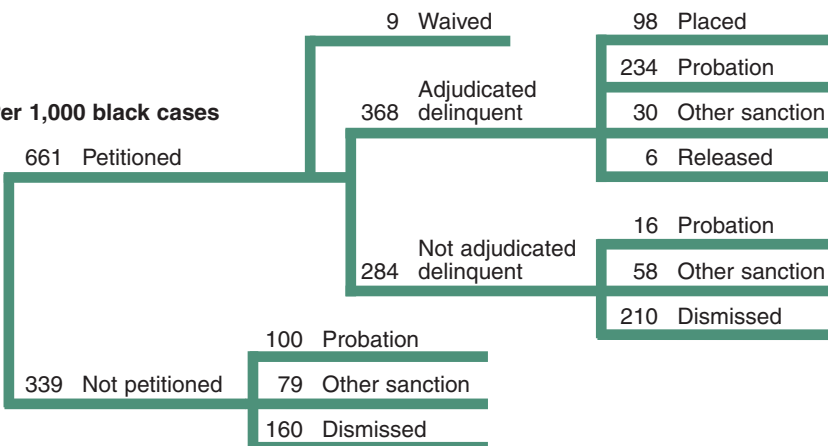
For person offense cases in 2002, juvenile courts ordered sanctions after adjudication at similar rates for white youth (369 of 1,000 cases) and black youth (362 of 1,000 cases)

Person offense cases

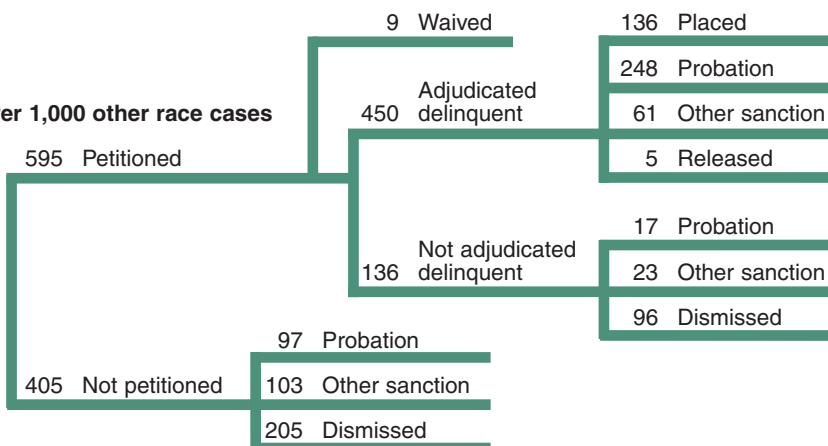
Per 1,000 white cases



Per 1,000 black cases



Per 1,000 other race cases



■ Person offense cases involving black youth were substantially more likely to be petitioned to court for formal processing than were cases involving white youth or youth of other races. Among black youth, 661 of 1,000 person cases were petitioned, compared with 567 for white youth and 595 for youth of other races.

■ The large disparity between white and black youth in the petitioning of person cases disappeared at adjudication. Of 1,000 person cases involving white youth, 378 were adjudicated delinquent. The figure for black youth was 368 of 1,000. Among youth of other races, however, the youth was adjudicated delinquent in 450 of 1,000 person cases.

■ Of 1,000 person offense cases involving white youth, 92 resulted in court-ordered residential placement. The comparative figures for black youth and youth of other races are 98 and 136, respectively.

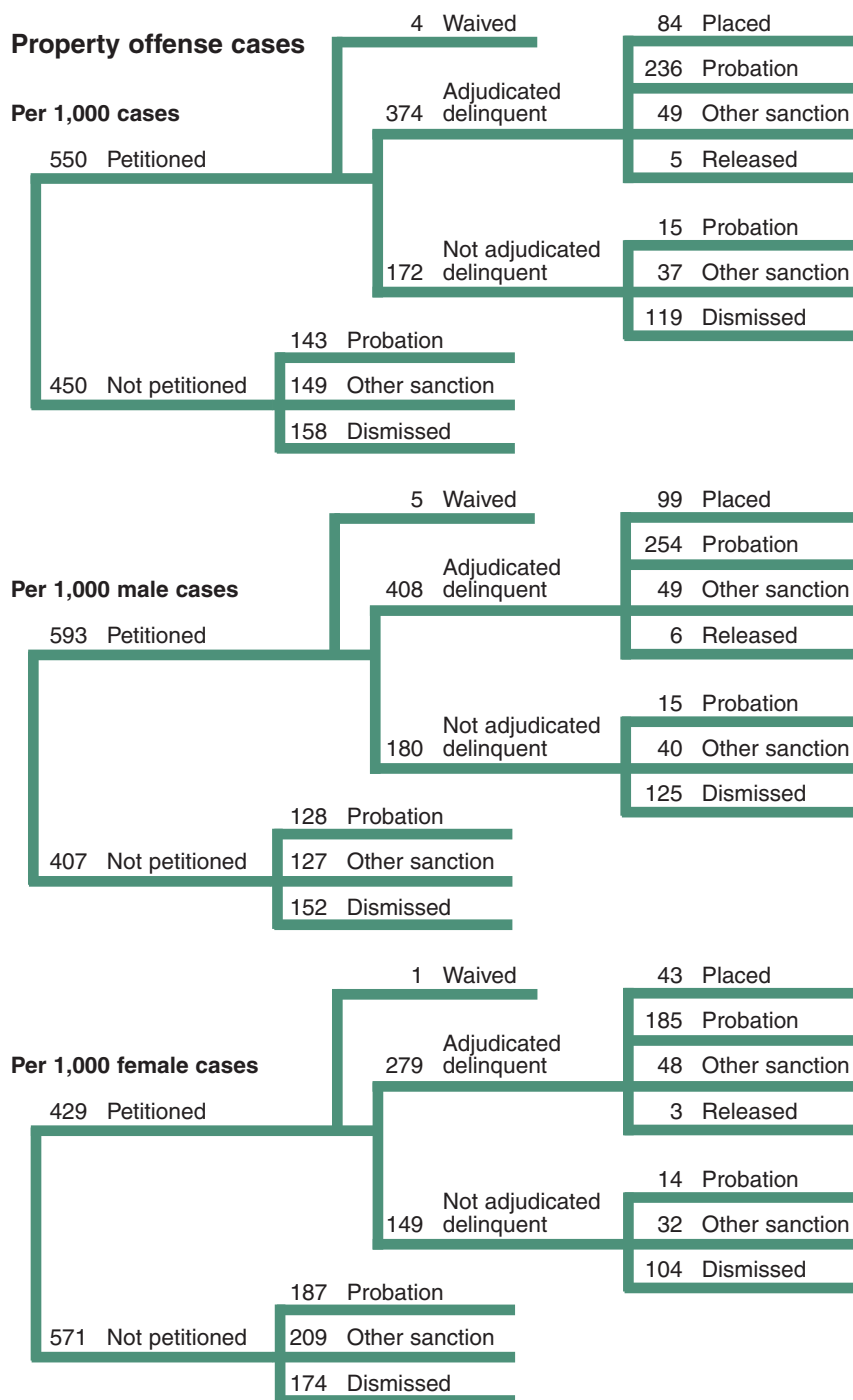
■ Juvenile courts waived to criminal court 7 in 1,000 person cases involving white youth. The waiver rate for person cases was 9 in 1,000 for black youth and for youth of other races.

■ These racial differences in the overall handling of person offense cases do not control for differences in offense seriousness, criminal histories, and other risk factors related to dispositional decisions and increased severity of sanctions.

Notes: Cases are categorized by their most severe or restrictive sanction. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: Authors' adaptation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's *Juveniles in court*. *OJJDP statistical briefing book*.

Substantial gender differences existed in the handling of property cases in 2002



■ Of 1,000 property offense cases involving males, 99 resulted in court-ordered placement in a residential facility and an additional 254 resulted in formal probation. For females, 43 property offense cases per 1,000 were ordered to residential placement and 185 were ordered to formal probation.

■ As with person cases, property cases involving males were petitioned at a higher rate than cases involving females (59% vs. 43%); if petitioned, were adjudicated at a higher rate (69% vs. 65%); and if adjudicated, were ordered to residential placement at a higher rate (24% vs. 16%).

■ Males and females were equally likely to have their property cases dismissed or otherwise released without the imposition of formal or informal sanctions. Of 1,000 property cases involving males, 283 were dismissed or released. Of 1,000 property cases involving females, 281 were dismissed or released.

■ These gender differences in the overall handling of property offense cases do not control for differences in offense seriousness, criminal histories, and other risk factors related to dispositional decisions and increased severity of sanctions.

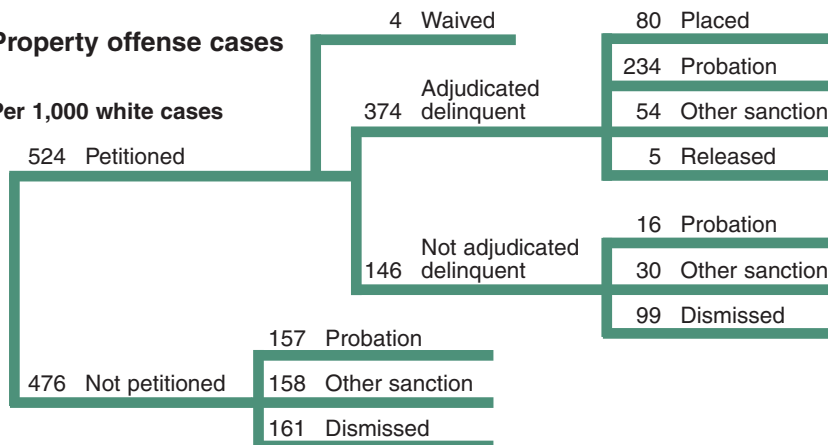
Notes: Cases are categorized by their most severe or restrictive sanction. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: Authors' adaptation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's *Juveniles in court*. *OJJDP statistical briefing book*.

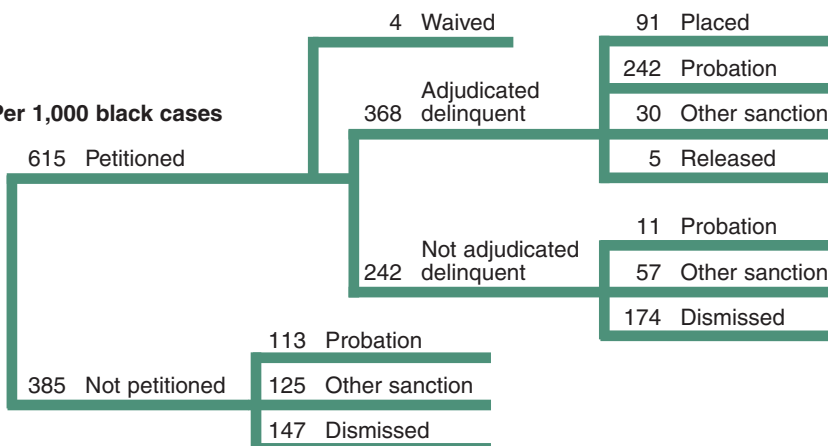
In 2002, property cases involving white or black youth were less likely to result in court-ordered sanctions than those involving youth of other races

Property offense cases

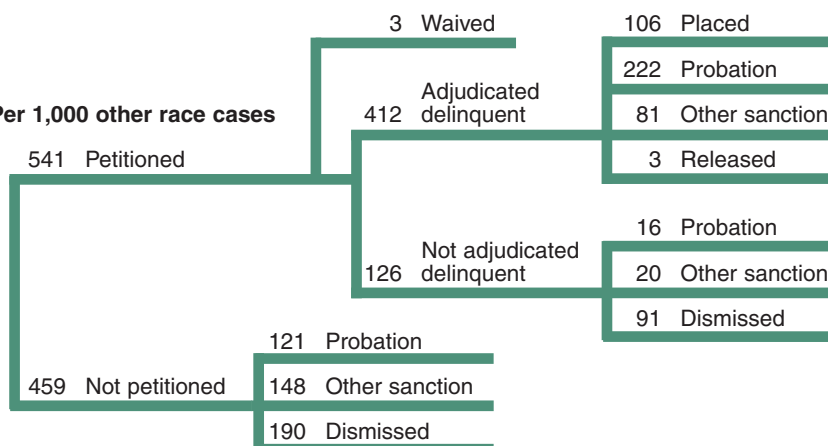
Per 1,000 white cases



Per 1,000 black cases



Per 1,000 other race cases



■ The court ordered sanctions after adjudication for 368 in 1,000 property cases involving whites, 363 in 1,000 cases involving blacks, and 409 in 1,000 cases involving youth of other races.

■ Of 1,000 property offense cases involving white youth, the court ordered 80 to residential placement. The figure was 91 for black youth and 106 for youth of other races.

■ Court-ordered sanctions other than residential placement or formal probation were less likely in property cases involving black youth (30 in 1,000) than in cases involving white youth (54) or youth of other races (81).

■ Black youth were the most likely to have their property offense cases dismissed or otherwise released without the imposition of formal or informal sanctions. Of 1,000 property cases involving black youth, 326 were dismissed or released. Of 1,000 property cases involving white youth, 265 were dismissed or released. For youth of other races, the figure was 284.

■ These racial differences in the overall handling of property offense cases do not control for differences in offense seriousness, criminal histories, and other risk factors related to dispositional decisions and increased severity of sanctions.

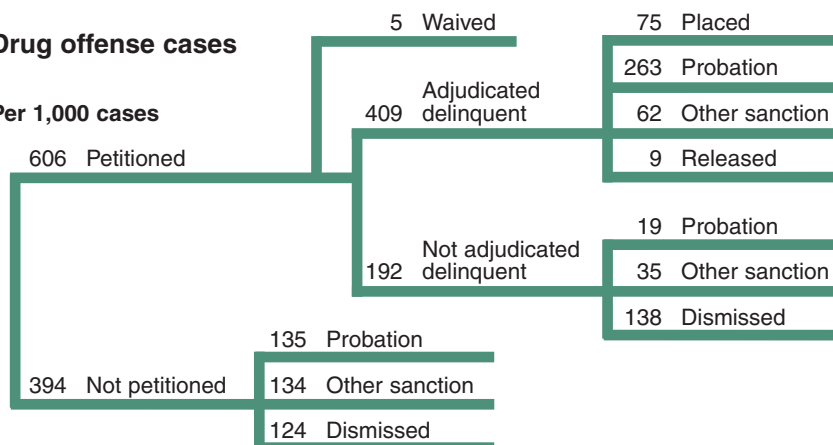
Notes: Cases are categorized by their most severe or restrictive sanction. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: Authors' adaptation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's *Juveniles in court*. *OJJDP statistical briefing book*.

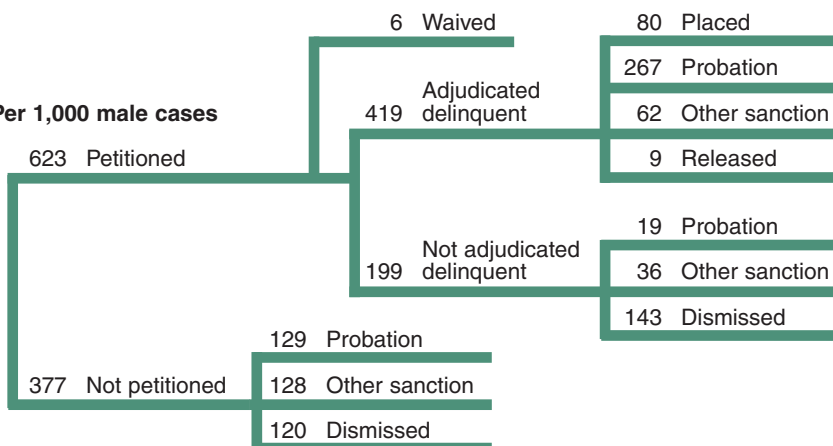
Gender differences in juvenile court handling of drug cases in 2002 diminished as cases proceeded through the system

Drug offense cases

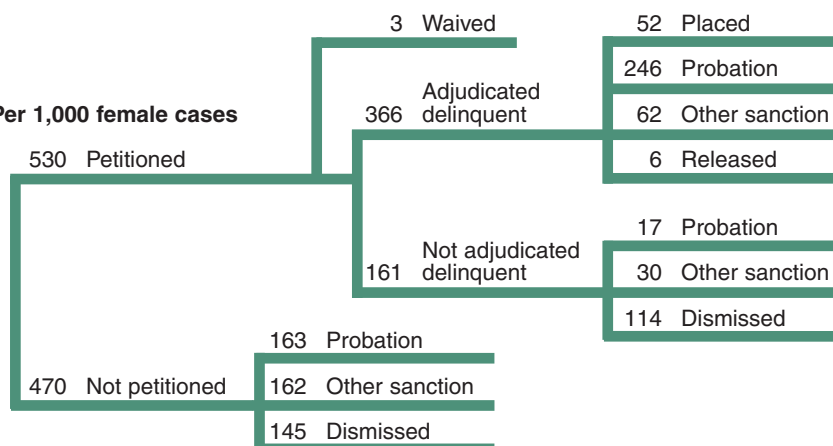
Per 1,000 cases



Per 1,000 male cases



Per 1,000 female cases



■ Of 1,000 drug cases involving males, 409 resulted in some sort of court-ordered sanction (residential placement, formal probation, restitution, community service, etc.) after adjudication. The comparative figure for females is 360.

■ This apparent gender difference in the handling of drug cases stems from a large difference between males and females in the proportion of cases petitioned for formal processing. Among males, 62% of drug cases were petitioned, compared with 53% for females. For both males and females, juvenile courts imposed formal sanctions in 98% of cases in which the juvenile was adjudicated delinquent.

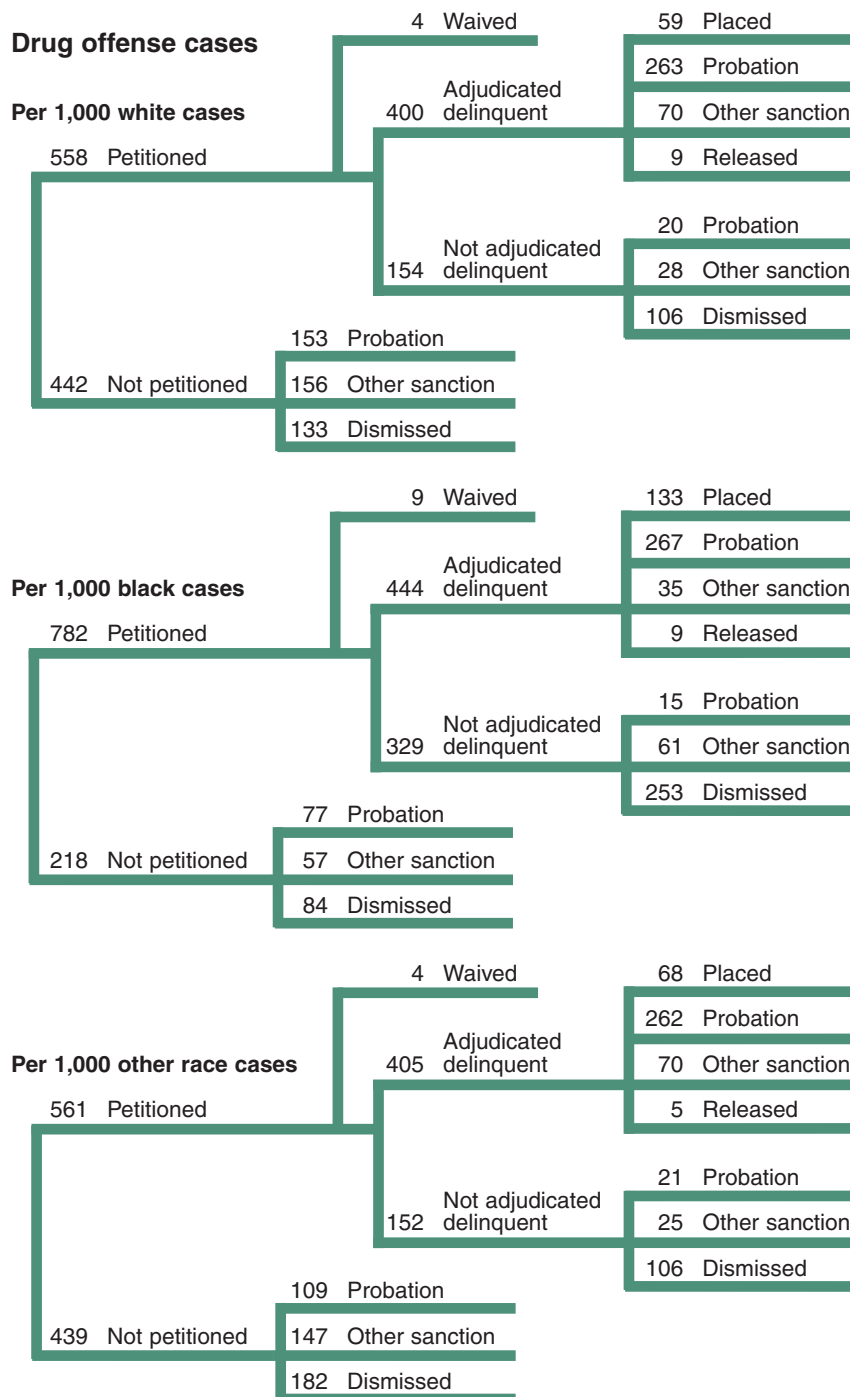
■ Males and females in drug cases were equally likely to receive court-ordered sanctions other than placement or probation, such as referral to another agency for treatment. Of 1,000 drug cases involving males, 62 received such sanctions. The figure was the same for females.

■ These gender differences in the overall handling of drug offense cases do not control for differences in offense seriousness, criminal histories, and other risk factors related to dispositional decisions and increased severity of sanctions.

Notes: Cases are categorized by their most severe or restrictive sanction. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: Authors' adaptation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's *Juveniles in court*. *OJJDP statistical briefing book*.

Substantial racial differences existed in the processing of drug offense cases in 2002



■ Drug cases involving black youth were much more likely than cases involving white youth or youth of other races to be petitioned at intake. Among blacks, 782 drug cases in 1,000 were petitioned. The figure was 558 among whites and 561 among youth of other races.

■ Black youth were substantially more likely than white youth or youth of other races to have their drug cases dismissed or otherwise released without the imposition of formal or informal sanctions. Of 1,000 drug cases involving black youth, 346 were dismissed or released. The majority of such cases (253) were dismissed following an adjudicatory hearing in which the youth was not adjudicated delinquent. Of 1,000 drug cases involving white youth, 248 were dismissed or released. For youth of other races, the figure was 293. Unlike black youth, both white youth and youth of other races were most often dismissed at intake, without an adjudicatory hearing.

■ The proportion of drug cases placed on formal probation was similar across racial groups (263 in 1,000 for whites, 267 for blacks, and 262 for other races).

■ These racial differences in the overall handling of drug offense cases do not control for differences in offense seriousness, criminal histories, and other risk factors related to dispositional decisions and increased severity of sanctions.

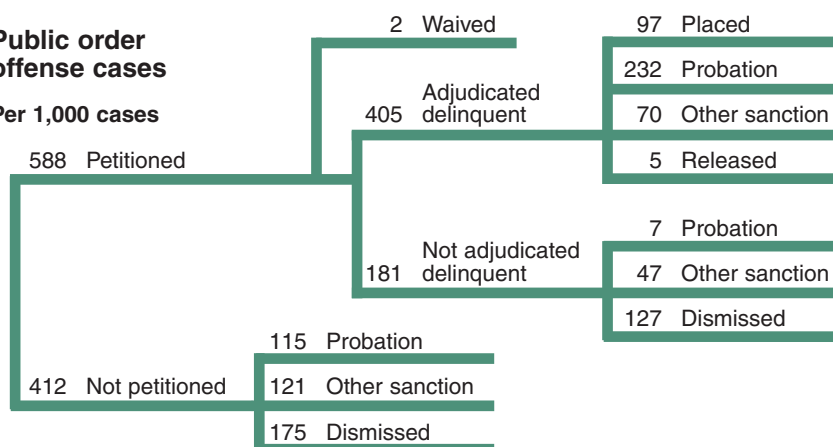
Notes: Cases are categorized by their most severe or restrictive sanction. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: Authors' adaptation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's *Juveniles in court*. *OJJDP statistical briefing book*.

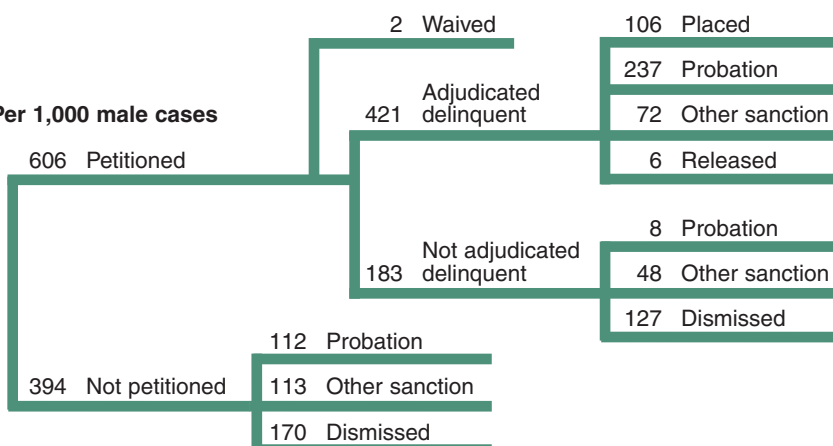
Juvenile courts ordered residential placement for 73 in 1,000 public order cases involving females and 106 in 1,000 involving males

Public order offense cases

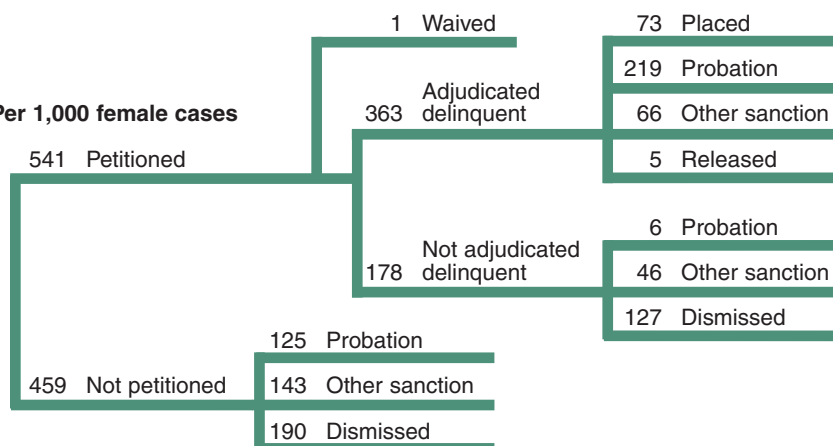
Per 1,000 cases



Per 1,000 male cases



Per 1,000 female cases



■ Of 1,000 public order cases involving males, 237 resulted in court-ordered probation. The figure for females was 219. However, in terms of the proportion of adjudicated public order cases, females were more likely to receive formal probation as their most severe disposition (60%) than were males (56%).

■ Residential placement was ordered for 106 of 1,000 public order cases involving males—about the same rate as that for person offense cases involving males (109). This relatively high placement rate reflects this category's inclusion of offenses such as weapons law violations, escape from custody, and probation or parole violations.

■ Among females, 73 of 1,000 public order cases resulted in court-ordered residential placement.

■ These gender differences in the overall handling of public order offense cases do not control for differences in offense seriousness, criminal histories, and other risk factors related to dispositional decisions and increased severity of sanctions.

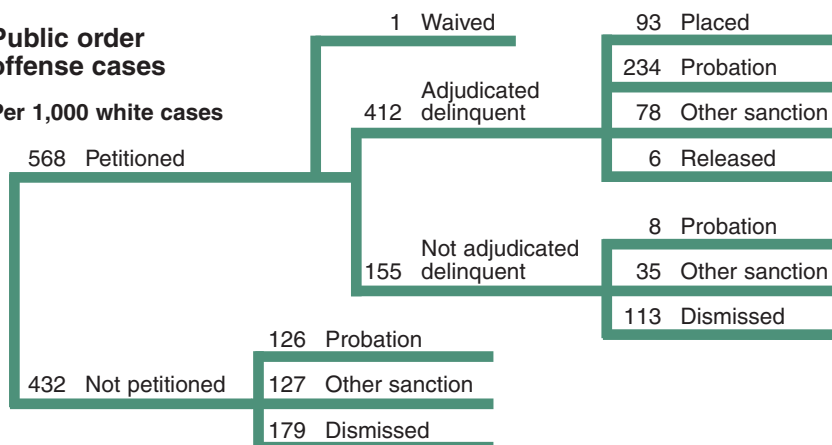
Notes: Cases are categorized by their most severe or restrictive sanction. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: Authors' adaptation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's *Juveniles in court*. *OJJDP statistical briefing book*.

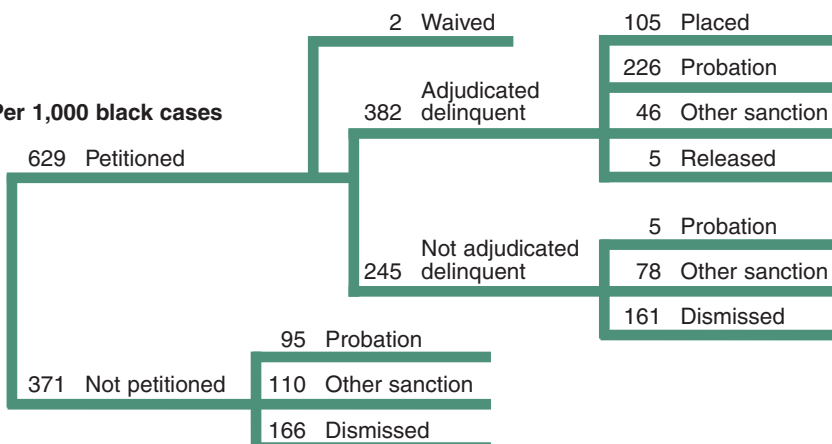
Regardless of race, juvenile courts waived relatively few public order cases to criminal court in 2002

Public order offense cases

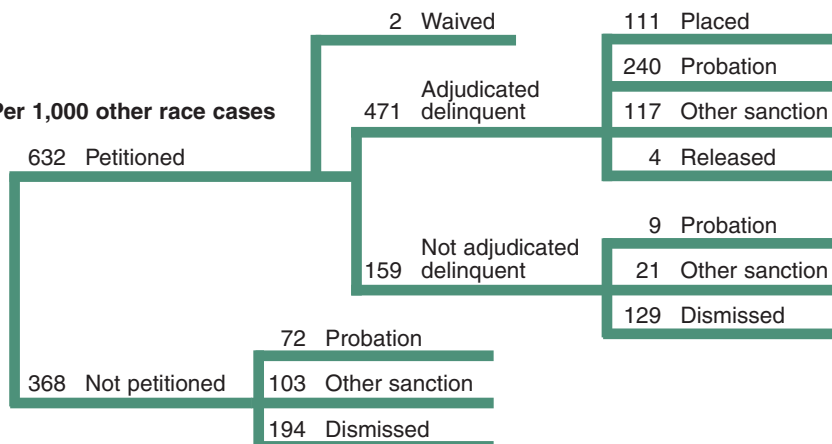
Per 1,000 white cases



Per 1,000 black cases



Per 1,000 other race cases



■ Black youth and youth of other races had their public order cases petitioned at about the same rate (629 per 1,000 for blacks and 632 per 1,000 for youth of other races). However, courts adjudicated youth of other races at a higher rate (471) than black youth (382).

■ Youth of other races were more likely than black youth or white youth to have their public order cases result in court-ordered sanctions other than residential placement or formal probation.

■ These racial differences in the overall handling of public order offense cases do not control for differences in offense seriousness, criminal histories, and other risk factors related to dispositional decisions and increased severity of sanctions.

Notes: Cases are categorized by their most severe or restrictive sanction. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

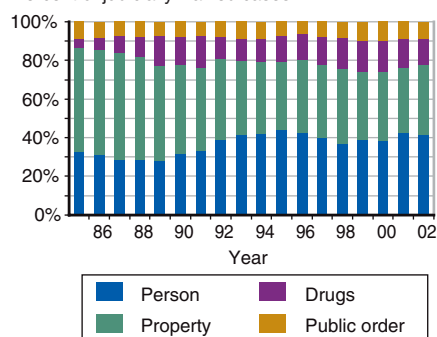
Source: Authors' adaptation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's *Juveniles in court*. *OJJDP statistical briefing book*.

Courts waived fewer cases in 2002 than in 1985—2001 had the fewest waivers of any year since 1985

The profile of waived cases has changed

In the late 1980s, property cases accounted for at least half of all delinquency cases judicially waived from juvenile court to criminal court. In the early 1990s, the property offense share of waived cases diminished as the person offense share grew. By 1993, the waiver caseload had a greater proportion of person offense cases than property cases (41% vs. 39%). Drug and public order cases made up smaller proportions of waived cases across all years. For example, in 2002, 14% of waived cases were drug offenses and 9% were public order cases.

Percent of judicially waived cases



The demographic characteristics of judicially waived cases have also changed since the 1980s.

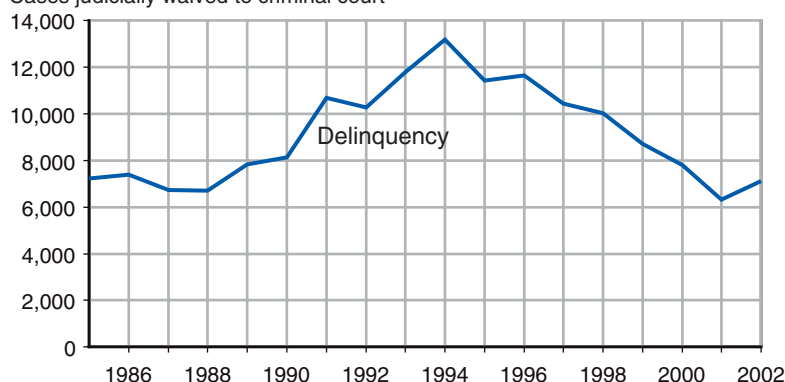
Demographic profiles of judicially waived delinquency cases:

Characteristic	1985	1994	2002
Gender			
Male	95%	95%	93%
Female	5	5	7
Race			
White	58	53	62
Black	41	43	35
Other races	2	4	3
Age			
15 or younger	6	12	13
16 or older	94	88	87

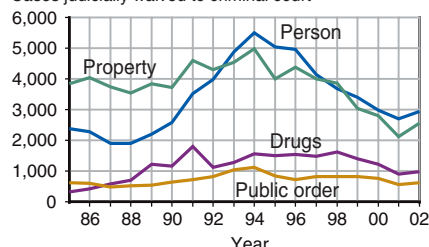
Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.

Juvenile courts waived 46% fewer delinquency cases to criminal court in 2002 than in 1994

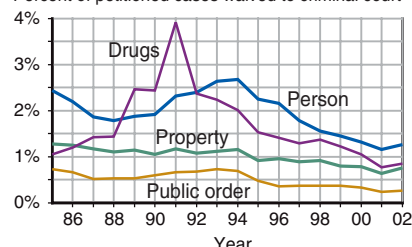
Cases judicially waived to criminal court



Cases judicially waived to criminal court



Percent of petitioned cases waived to criminal court



- The number of delinquency cases waived to criminal court climbed 83% from 1985 to 1994, from 7,200 to 13,200. By 2001, waived cases were down to 6,300—below the 1985 level. The slight upturn in waived cases for 2002 left the number of waivers in 2002 1% below the number in 1985.
- For most of the period from 1993 through 2002, person offenses outnumbered property offenses among waived cases. Prior to 1993, property cases outnumbered person offense cases among waivers—sometimes by a ratio of nearly 2 to 1.
- The number of waived person offense cases increased 130% from 1985 to 1994 then declined 47% to 2002 for an overall increase of 23% between 1985 and 2002. Over this period, waived property offense cases were down 33% and waived public order offense cases were down 2%.
- The overall proportion of petitioned delinquency cases that were waived was 1.4% in 1985, reached 1.5% in 1991 and 1993, and then dropped to 0.8% by 2002.
- For most years between 1985 and 2002, person offense cases were the most likely type of case to be waived to criminal court. The exception was 1989–1991, when drug offense cases were the most likely to be waived.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

Although the proportions of judicially waived cases involving females and younger juveniles increased between 1985 and 2002, the vast majority of waived cases involved males age 16 or older. However, the proportion of males age 16 or older among judicially waived cases decreased somewhat, from 89% in 1985 to 80% in 2002.

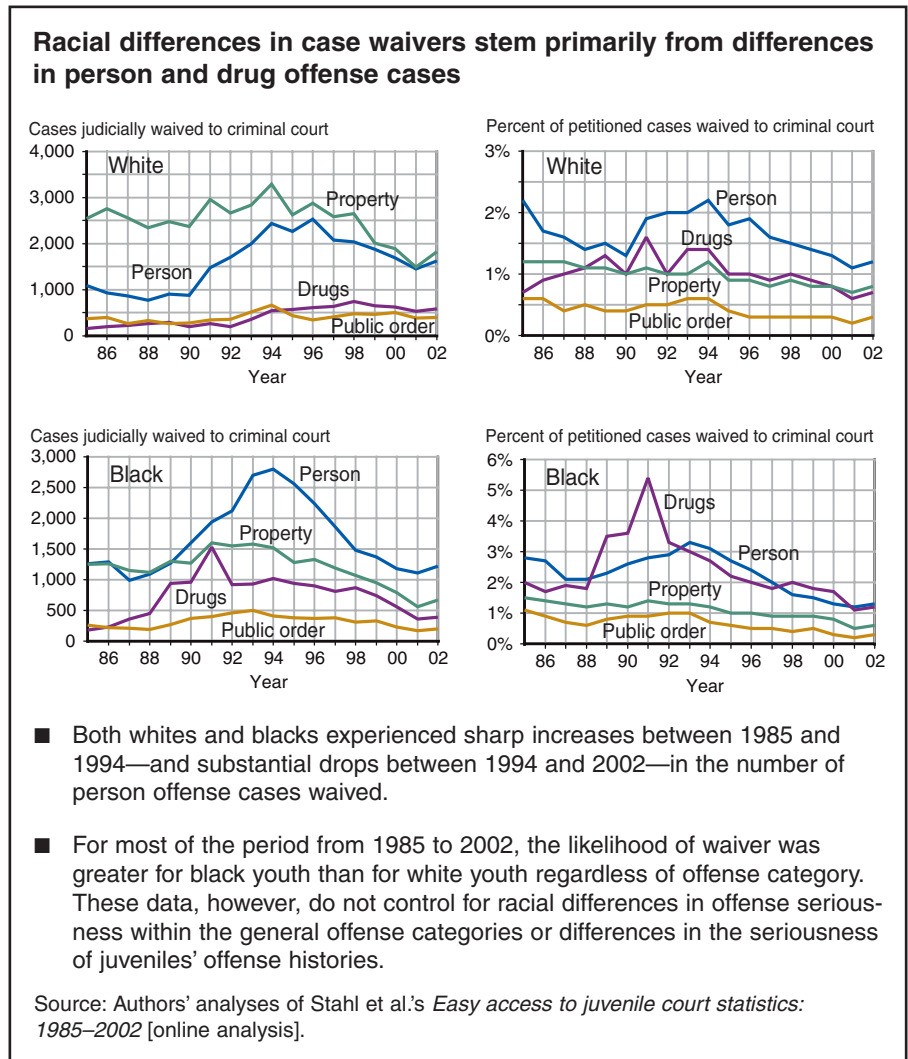
The likelihood of waiver varied across case characteristics

In 2002, the proportion of cases waived was greater for males than for females. This was true in each of the four general offense categories. For example, males charged with person offenses were six times as likely as females charged with person offenses to have their cases waived to criminal court. However, this comparison does not control for differences in the seriousness of offenses or a juvenile's offense history.

Percent of petitioned cases judicially waived to criminal court, 2002:

Offense	Male	Female
Delinquency	0.9%	0.3%
Person	1.6	0.3
Property	0.9	0.3
Drugs	0.9	0.5
Public order	0.3	0.1

In 2002, black youth were more likely than other youth to be waived for drug offenses. White youth were more likely than other youth to be waived for property offenses. Youth of other races were more likely than white youth or black youth to be waived for person offenses. Regardless of race, person offenses were more likely to be waived than cases involving other offenses.



Percent of petitioned cases judicially waived to criminal court, 2002:

Offense	White	Black	Other races
Delinquency	0.7%	0.8%	0.7%
Person	1.2	1.3	1.5
Property	0.8	0.6	0.6
Drugs	0.7	1.2	0.7
Public order	0.3	0.3	0.3

Cases involving younger juveniles were less likely to be waived than were cases involving older juveniles. This was true for each of the four general offense categories. For

example, among person offense cases, youth age 16 or older were seven times more likely to be waived than youth age 15 or younger.

Percent of petitioned cases judicially waived to criminal court, 2002:

Offense	Age 15 or younger	Age 16 or older
Delinquency	0.2%	1.5%
Person	0.4	2.7
Property	0.1	1.6
Drugs	0.0	1.4
Public order	0.1	0.5

Monitoring racial disproportionality in the justice system can reveal potential sources of discrimination

Research finds evidence of disparity in juvenile case processing

While research findings are not completely consistent, reviews (by Pope and Feyerherm and by Pope, Lovell, and Hsia) of existing research literature found that minority (especially black) youth are overrepresented at most stages of the juvenile justice system. Since that review, a rather large body of research has accumulated across numerous geographic regions that reinforces these earlier findings. Based on this research and the fact that juvenile justice systems are fragmented and administered at the local level, it is likely that racial/ethnic disparities exist in some jurisdictions but not in others and

that these differences may vary over time.

The extent to which research links disparity to demographic characteristics (thereby implying discrimination) may be affected in part by the research design. For example, the simple proportion of adjudicated youth placed in an out-of-home facility may be greater for minority youth than white youth; however, when the research study controls for the nature of the crimes for which the youth were adjudicated, the statistical effect of race on justice decisionmaking is generally reduced. One could argue that if researchers considered all the factors that decisionmakers consider (e.g., the number and attributes of past offenses, gang involvement, victims'

statements, compliance with previous dispositional orders, and family/community support), the statistical effect of race on decisionmaking could be further reduced and possibly even removed. Given that disparity and overrepresentation may exist in the absence of discrimination, it is a challenge for research to determine if there is a unique effect of discrimination on justice system decisionmaking.

Racial/ethnic disparities occur at various decision points within the juvenile justice system

When racial/ethnic disparities do occur, they can be found at any stage of processing within the juvenile justice system. Research suggests that disparity is most pronounced at arrest, the beginning stage, and that when racial/ethnic differences exist, their effects accumulate as youth are processed through the justice system.

One factor to consider in understanding overrepresentation is that outcomes often depend on the jurisdiction in which the youth is processed (Feld's concept of "justice by geography"). For example, juvenile court cases in urban jurisdictions are more likely to receive severe outcomes (e.g., detention prior to adjudication, out-of-home placement following adjudication) than are cases in nonurban areas. Because minority populations are concentrated in urban areas, this geographical effect may work to overrepresent minority youth at each stage of processing when case statistics are summarized at the state level—even when there is no disparity at the local level.

The terms overrepresentation, disparity, and discrimination have different meanings

Overrepresentation refers to a situation in which a larger proportion of a particular group is present at various stages within the juvenile justice system (such as intake, detention, adjudication, and disposition) than would be expected based on its proportion in the general population.

Disparity means that the probability of receiving a particular outcome (e.g., being detained vs. not being detained) differs for different groups. Disparity may in turn lead to overrepresentation.

Discrimination occurs when juvenile justice system decisionmakers treat one group differently from another group based wholly, or in part, on their gender, race, and/or ethnicity.

Neither overrepresentation nor disparity necessarily implies discrimination, although it is one possible explanation. If racial discrimination is

a part of justice system decisionmaking, minority youth can face higher probabilities of being arrested, referred to court intake, held in short-term detention, petitioned for formal processing, adjudicated delinquent, and confined in a secure juvenile facility.

Disparity and overrepresentation, however, can result from behavioral and legal factors rather than discrimination. For example, if minority youth commit proportionately more (and more serious) crimes than white youth, they will be overrepresented in secure facilities, even when there was no discrimination by system decisionmakers. In any given jurisdiction, either or both of these causes of overrepresentation/disparity may be operating.

Research is necessary to reveal the decision points at which disparity occurs and to uncover the dynamics that lead to overrepresentation.

The meaning and measurement of DMC have changed

Prior to 2002, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act required states to assess their level of disproportionate minority confinement (DMC) by using a statistic that divided the proportion of a given minority group of youth who were detained or confined in a state's secure detention facilities, secure correctional facilities, jails, and lockups by the proportion that group represented in the general population. If this statistic (known as the DMC Index) was significantly greater than 1.0 (which was most often the case), the state was required to develop and implement a plan to reduce the disproportionality.

Problems interpreting the DMC Index soon became apparent. First, comparing one jurisdiction's Index to another's was difficult. For example, assume one community's youth population was 3% minority and its juvenile custody population was 12% minority, resulting in a DMC Index of 4. Now assume the other community's youth population was 50% minority and its custody population was 100% minority, resulting in a DMC Index of 2. Which community's juvenile justice system processing is most racially disparate? Clearly, the value of the DMC Index was related in part to the proportion of minority youth in the general population. Communities with low minority proportions could have very high DMC Indexes while communities with high percentages of minority youth could not.

Another problem with the DMC Index was that it provided limited guidance on where to look for the source(s) of disparity. Was disparity introduced at all stages of the system and did it accumulate from beginning to end, or was it introduced

only at the earliest stage and then remained through the end stages?

Recognizing that disparity may exist at many decision points (not just detention and corrections), in 2002, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act broadened the concept labeled "DMC" from disproportionate minority confinement to disproportionate minority contact. Under this new conceptualization, as youth pass through the different stages of the juvenile justice system, they make contact with a series of

decisionmakers, each of whom could render a decision that potentially could result in racial disparity. Measuring the disparity at each decision point gives a better understanding of where disparity is introduced and/or magnified in the handling of cases by the juvenile justice system. To address problems with the DMC Index, OJJDP has developed a tool to measure the levels of disparity at each decision point. This tool is called the DMC Relative Rate Index (RRI).

The national Relative Rate Index matrix for 2002 finds more racial disparity at arrest and detention than at other decision points

Decision points	White	Black	Relative Rate Index
Juvenile arrests	1,576,400	625,500	
Cases referred to juvenile court	1,086,700	473,100	
Cases detained	199,700	118,600	
Cases petitioned	596,800	306,000	
Cases judicially waived to criminal court	4,400	2,500	
Cases adjudicated delinquent	421,400	179,000	
Adjudicated cases resulting in placement	90,400	47,500	
Rates (per 100)			
Juvenile arrests to population*	6.1	11.5	1.9
Cases referred to juvenile arrests	68.9	75.6	1.1
Cases detained to cases referred	18.4	25.1	1.4
Cases petitioned to cases referred	54.9	64.7	1.2
Cases waived to cases petitioned	0.7	0.8	1.1
Cases adjudicated to cases petitioned	70.6	58.5	0.8
Placements to cases adjudicated	21.5	26.5	1.2

- For every 100 white youth ages 10–17 in the U.S. population, there were 6.1 arrests of white youth under age 18. The rate for black youth was 11.5, yielding an RRI for the arrest decision of 1.9. The black rate was almost double the white rate.
- Except for the adjudication decision point, the RRI shows a degree of racial disparity for black youth. This disparity accumulates throughout the process, so that in the end, while black youth were 16% of the youth population and were involved in 28% of the arrests of youth in 2002, they accounted for 33% of the juvenile court cases that resulted in an out-of-home placement.

* Population ages 10–17 = 25,994,400 (white) and 5,431,300 (black).

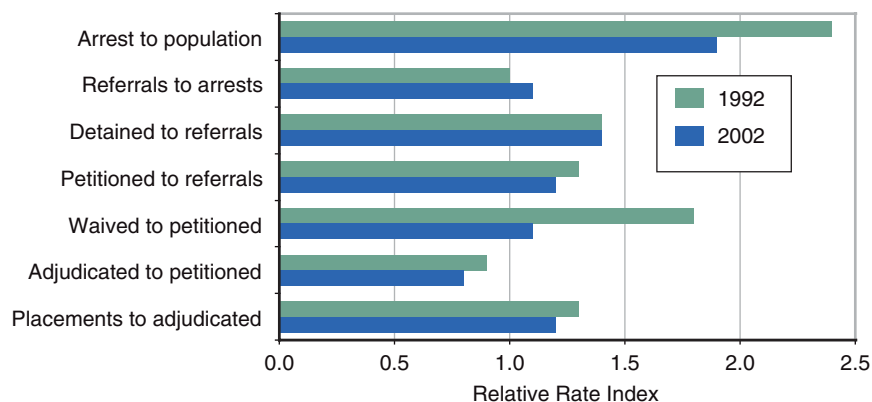
Source: Authors' analysis of Puzzanchera et al.'s *Easy access to juvenile populations* [online analysis], Stahl et al.'s *Easy access to juvenile court statistics 1985–2002* [online analysis], and the FBI's *Crime in the United States 2002*.

The RRI measures disparity at each decision point

The RRI tests for disparity at a series of decision points, typically arrest, referral to juvenile court, detention, petitioning, transfer to criminal court, adjudication, and out-of-home placement following adjudication. (The actual set of decision points used by states and local jurisdictions depends on the structure of their juvenile justice systems and the quality of available data.) The key idea behind the RRI is to quantify the nature of the decisions at each decision point for each racial group and then compare these decisions.

For example, after arrest, law enforcement must decide if the youth should be referred to juvenile court intake. The RRI compares the proportions (or rates) of white and black arrests that are referred to court intake. If, for example, the rate of referral to court intake was 60 out of 100 arrests for whites and 80 out of 100 for blacks, then black arrests were more likely than white arrests to result in referral to juvenile court. There is disparity at this decision point. If the rates had been similar, there would be no evidence of disparity at this decision point. To simplify the comparison of these statistics, the RRI divides the black rate by the white rate at each decision point, and if this ratio (i.e., the Relative Rate Index) is near or equal to 1.0, there is no evidence of disparity; if the ratio is greater than 1.0 (i.e., if the black rate is larger than the white rate), there is evidence of disparity, and this decision process needs further study to understand why.

The degree of racial disparity in the juvenile justice system declined between 1992 and 2002, especially at two decision points: arrest and waiver to criminal court



Source: Authors' analysis of Puzzanchera et al.'s *Easy access to juvenile populations* [online analysis], Stahl et al.'s *Easy access to juvenile court statistics 1985–2002* [online analysis], and the FBI's *Crime in the United States 1992* and *Crime in the United States 2002*.

Each decision point has a preceding stage with which it is compared (e.g., arrests are compared to population, court referrals to arrest, detentions to court referrals, petitions to court referrals, adult court transfers to petitions, adjudications to petitions, and out-of-home placements to adjudications). Together this set of decision points and their relative rate indexes form the Relative Rate Index Matrix, a table that can reveal the nature of decision disparities—including their magnitude and differences—in a juvenile justice system that is interdependent though fragmented.

The Relative Rate Index Matrix is a diagnostic tool that can be used by juvenile justice professionals to assess decisionmaking disparity within a jurisdiction for subgroups

other than those defined solely by their racial/ethnic classification. For example, the tool could compare the processing of white and minority youth charged with a drug offense or the processing decisions for white and minority youth at their first referral to juvenile court intake. Or it could compare the processing of juvenile males and females, older and younger juveniles, youth from different neighborhoods or school districts, youth with different family structures, or youth with different needs and/or risks. Disparity can exist for many reasons. Although the Relative Rate Index does not diagnose the reasons for disparity, it distills data into statistics that decisionmakers can use to assess the vital signs of the local juvenile justice system and, in doing so, target areas of concern.

The formal status offense caseload differs substantially from the delinquency caseload

What are status offenses?

Status offenses are behaviors that are law violations only if committed by a person of juvenile status. Such behaviors include running away from home, ungovernability (being beyond the control of parents or guardians), truancy, and underage drinking (which also applies to young adults through age 20). A number of other behaviors may be considered status offenses (e.g., curfew violations, tobacco offenses), but they are not detailed in these analyses.

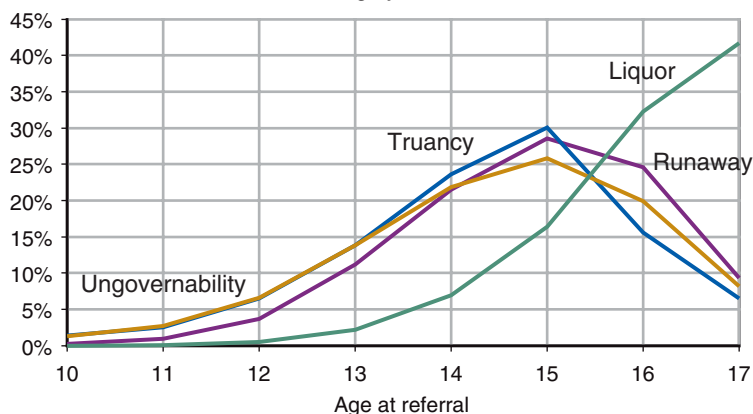
In many jurisdictions, agencies other than juvenile courts are responsible for handling status offense cases. In some communities, for example, family crisis units, county attorneys, and social services agencies have assumed this responsibility. If status offense cases are referred to juvenile court, the court may divert some of these youth away from the formal justice system to other agencies for service rather than filing a petition for formal processing. The analyses presented here are based on juvenile court data and are, thus, limited to cases petitioned to court for formal processing between 1985 and 2002.*

Of petitioned status offense cases handled by juvenile courts between 1985 and 2002 involving charges of truancy or liquor law violations, running away from home, or ungovernability, the most common were truancy violations (34%), followed by liquor law violations (30%), running away (19%), and ungovernability (17%).

*Available data cannot support national estimates of the trends and volume of petitioned status offense cases. Data are presented as sample-based profiles of cases disposed during the period 1985–2002.

The volume of petitioned truancy, runaway, and ungovernability cases peaks at age 15

Percent of cases within offense category, 1985–2002



■ For status liquor law violation cases, the proportion of cases increases substantially throughout the juvenile years.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.

Females account for most runaway cases

A major difference between delinquency and status offense cases is the large proportion of status cases that involve females.

Percent of petitioned status offense cases involving females, 1985–2002

Offense	Female proportion
Runaway	61%
Truancy	46
Ungovernability	46
Liquor	30

Runaway cases were less likely to be adjudicated than other types of status offense cases

Percent of petitioned status offense cases adjudicated, 1985–2002

Offense	Total	Male	Female
Runaway	46%	47%	45%
Truancy	63	63	63
Ungovernability	63	63	62
Liquor	63	64	61

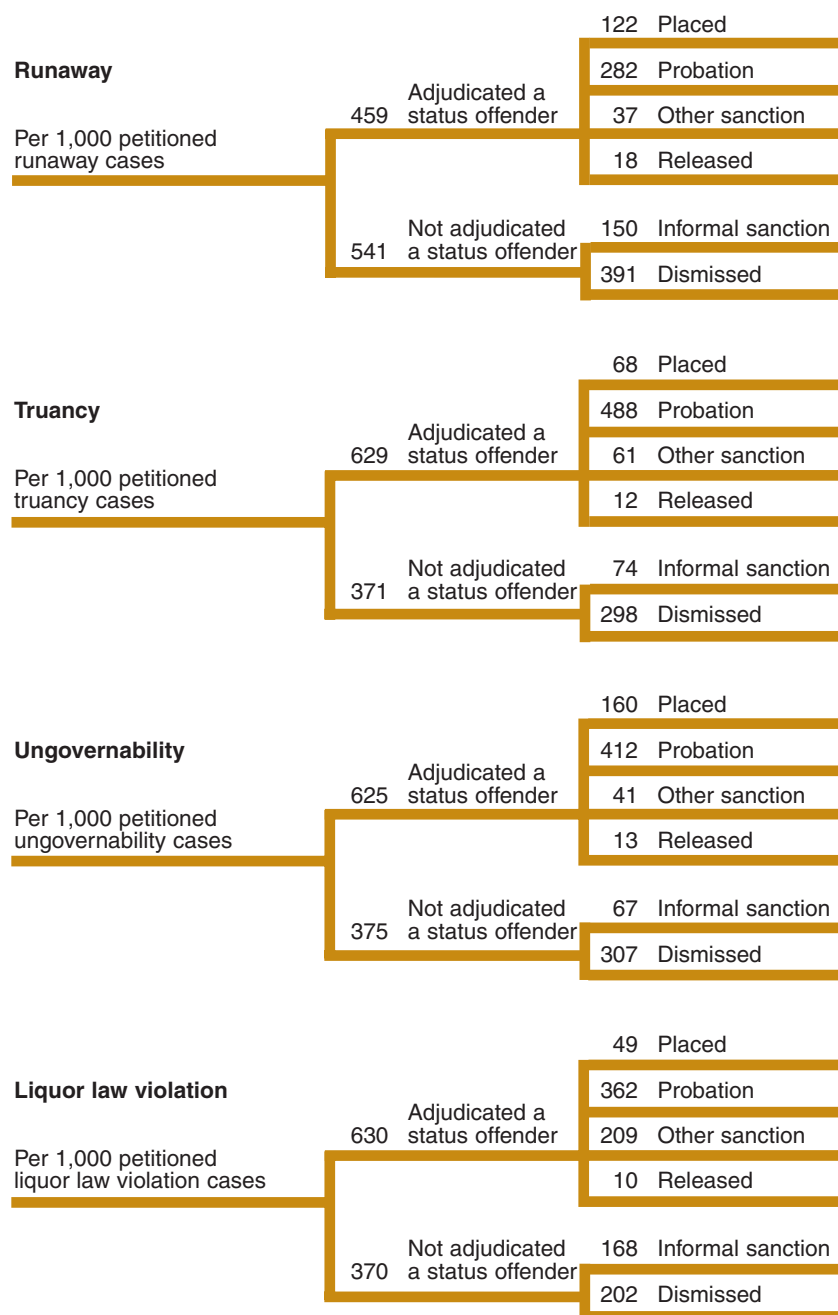
The juvenile court ordered probation in most adjudicated status offense cases

From 1985 through 2002, among adjudicated runaway, truancy, ungovernability, and liquor law violation cases, formal probation was the most likely disposition. Some cases resulted in out-of-home (residential) placement, and some (primarily liquor cases) resulted in other sanctions such as fines, community service, restitution, or referrals to other agencies for services. The remaining few were released with no additional sanction.

Percent of adjudicated status offense cases receiving disposition, 1985–2002

Offense	Residential placement	Formal probation
Runaway	27%	61%
Truancy	11	78
Ungovernability	26	66
Liquor	8	57

From 1985 through 2002, juvenile courts were less likely to order probation in runaway cases than in other status offense cases



■ Of 1,000 petitioned runaway cases, 282 were ordered to formal probation. In comparison, the figure was 488 for truancy cases, 412 for ungovernability cases, and 362 for liquor law violation cases.

■ Among petitioned runaway cases, the youth was not adjudicated in 541 of 1,000 cases. Of these 541 cases, 150 received informal sanctions or were referred to a social services agency for handling, and 391 were dismissed.

■ Of 1,000 petitioned truancy cases, 629 were adjudicated, and 617 received some sort of formal sanction. Use of informal sanctions was relatively uncommon in formally processed truancy cases (74 of 1,000).

■ Juvenile courts were more likely to order youth to residential placement in petitioned ungovernability cases (160 of 1,000) than in other types of status offense cases, but formal probation was the most likely court-ordered disposition for ungovernability cases (412 of 1,000).

■ Among petitioned liquor law violation cases, the most likely outcome was formal probation (362 of 1,000), although the court often ordered formal sanctions other than residential placement or probation (209 of 1,000).

Note: Cases are categorized by their most severe or restrictive sanction. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: Authors' adaptation of Stahl et al.'s *Juvenile Court Statistics 2001–2002*.



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